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"Forbidden."

By HELEN F. HETHERINGTON,

Part Author of "PAUL NUGENT, MATERIALIST," "NO COMPROMISE,"
"LED ON," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XL.

A HARD FIGHT.

ASHFORD VILLA having won the toss, Jack Malet, centre-forward, kicked off for the Athenians, and at once the game began in deadly earnest.

Eager eyes watched every movement, though to the ignorant onlooker, it seemed a perfectly unintelligible muddle, as a series of rushes, charges, tackles and passes began. Hugh Pemberton was to be seen here, there, and everywhere; wherever the ball was, he was sure to be close at hand; and the crowd soon singled him out for their special attention.

Cries of "Well played, Pemberton," broke out into positive yells of approval, when the Athenians having placed a "corner" nicely in the mouth of the goal, an Ashford Villa forward got away with the ball, and thought he was going to have it all his own way. Hugh charged him like a thunderbolt, stopped him, and with a low hard shot, sent it spinning only one foot outside the post.

Again there was an ugly rush of three Ashford Villa forwards—Forrester went down, Malet missed his kick, and all seemed lost, when Hugh, by a desperate effort, managed to head the ball, and amidst the frantic cries of the spectators contrived to get it away safely. Still the game seemed an even chance—as one member of the crowd remarked, "Nothing in it, one way or the other." Ashford Villa was very strong in defence. In vain the Athenians made a dangerous attack in front of the goal. Tom Graham was always on

the spot, and "fisted out" again and again, but all his skill would have availed him nothing, if one of his own half-backs had not tripped up Pemberton, just as he was in the act of shooting the ball between the posts.

There were excited cries of "Foul! Foul!" from different quarters of the ground, but the referee saw nothing to complain of, and there was a very pretty bit of play when the Ashford Villa forwards, getting well together, passed the ball with lightning-like rapidity from one to the other, and landed a goal amidst a perfect storm of cheering. Half-time was called when Ashford Villa were one goal to love.

"Football is a failure," Lady Crosby decided at once, when it was explained to her that the "pro's" were getting the best of it. "As to playing it, I would rather try a less violent sort of death. Frozen and disappointed, I am going home."

"The light won't last much longer, you may as well wait till the end," Beatrice remonstrated.

"No, our friends have been defeated," she said sadly. "In the next round, or whatever they call it, they may be crippled or mangled; you might tell me about it this evening, but I should not like to see it done before my eyes. Captain Pemberton's nose is too good a shape to be smashed. Good-bye."

Flo felt a fierce contempt for her as she departed with the Baron in her train. Nothing but the direst necessity would have torn her from her place. She was shivering with the cold, and sitting or standing in the open air on a winter's afternoon was not a position to her taste; but as long as the play went on, she was determined to last out, even at the risk of being reduced to an icicle in the interval.

"I won't stay a moment longer than you wish," Beatrice said, fully conscious of her responsibilities as Flora's hostess.

"You couldn't," she replied, with a little laugh. "I suppose they shut the gates when all is over. What are they doing now?"

"Changing ends," Townshend-Rivers informed her. "They always do it at half-time, and it sometimes changes the luck."

It seemed to do so on this occasion, for the Athenians scored a goal in the space of five minutes. Then the excitement gradually rose higher and higher till it reached boiling point, and the shouts of the crowd grew loud and incessant. The two elevens fought their hardest, for they knew that the Cup depended on the issue of this game. There was no other team in the competition which was con-

sidered to be "in it" at all, consequently victory must mean the Cup for one side or the other. Every good bit of play met with instant recognition, and frantic cheering broke out on every opportunity. Both teams had pulled themselves together, and were doing their level best.

The interest was breathless; one elderly clergyman carried out of himself by excitement, rapped down the hat he was waving enthusiastically on the umbrella which an old woman in front of him had put up to keep off the wind, and sent her clean over. There was much laughter about it afterwards, but at the moment the bystanders were too much engrossed to take any notice of it, for it is only two minutes to time, and Pemberton has got the ball, and is doing a little dribbling.

The crowd grow absolutely frantic—they think he is keeping it too long. Shouts of "Kick!" "Get rid of it!" and "Pass!" but he knows what he is about. He has got within shooting distance of the goal now, and the cries change to "Shoot!" He gets past one forward, and then another, tackled by a back, he wrenches himself away to a storm of cheers, and for one instant there is a clear line for a shot at the goal.

"Shoot!" shouts the crowd as with one hoarse yell, and steadying himself for a moment, he puts in a hard high shot for the corner of the goal, when a back comes thundering down on him with a vicious charge, and sends him rolling over with a heavy thud; but at the same moment that his head touches the grass, the ball goes spinning gaily through the posts, and a tremendous cheer goes up to proclaim victory for the Athenians. The Cup is won!

The referee's whistle blows long, loud and shrill, announcing by the same blast—"Time—goal—man hurt!"

The Athenians had won by two goals to one, and Hugh Pemberton, the gallant centre half-back was the hero of the hour. The crowd were waiting to give him an ovation—but where was he?

There was still a great noise of cheering, but suddenly it stopped; men ceased to wave their hats, and looked questioningly at each other's faces. A chill, a cold shivering chill, fell across the fever of their enthusiasm.

Beatrice had been as much excited as anyone there, and she could not understand the sudden silence which fell like a blight on the seething multitude. At first a small group collected near the middle

of the ground, but during the last few minutes, thousands of people had gathered round the group and hidden it completely from her eyes.

"Why don't they chair him? Isn't that what they call it? And why are they all so dumb?"

"I'll see if your carriage is here," Townsend-Rivers said, with apparent irrelevancy. "You ought to go home, or you will both be laid up with colds."

Beatrice looked straight in his face, and her own grew as white as her handkerchief. "Something has happened," she said slowly, as an icy grip seemed to be laid on her heart.

"Did you hear what that man said?" Flo exclaimed breathlessly. "He—he said, 'It's all up with the poor fellow!' Is anyone hurt?"

"Go—for God's sake—go," Beatrice implored, and Townshend-Rivers after one look in her face—went. There are moments when delay means fiendish cruelty.

All the other men whom they knew had vanished from the pavilion, and the girls were practically alone. Flora listened with strained ears to every word she could catch from the crowd below as Pemberton's name passed from lip to lip, but Beatrice stood bolt upright, her dark eyes seeing nothing, though fixed on the crowded space in front of her, her lips parted, her whole expression one of absorbing dread. Hugh Pemberton was dead! She felt sure of it, yes, quite sure. Everything that was most dreadful always happened now. He had just come back to her to be the friend—the brother—that she needed so desperately, so of course he was taken from her!

"Oh God! What *will* become of me?" The words broke from her against her will, and even without her knowledge—the outcome of this horror of great loneliness which was settling down on her frightened soul.

Flora looked up at her with startled eyes. The words seemed to her the revelation of a fact she dared not face. She clung to her arm, trembling violently, without the power of uttering even one sympathetic platitude. In the midst of her agitation she caught sight of one of the Athenians, elbowing his way towards them, and after an instant of doubt because of his mud-stained features and clothes, recognised Val Forrester.

"Nothing to be alarmed at," he cried cheerfully, as his eyes glanced from one frightened face to the other, and he saw that he

must measure his words. "Only a slight concussion, the doctor says. May be on his legs again in a week's time."

The relief was so immense, that Beatrice gave a little hysterical laugh, but could not speak a word. Her eyes were swimming in tears—glad tears of thankfulness to know that Hugh was still in the same world as herself—and her shaking hands could scarcely fasten her veil which had come undone.

She was grateful to Flora for asking the questions she wanted to put to Forrester, but she could say nothing herself. In answer, he swore on his honour that he was not deceiving them, and told her that they were going to take Pemberton home in the brake which had brought them on to the ground, and that either he or Townie would look after the poor chap.

Then he offered to escort them to the carriage, apologising for his disreputable appearance, but they were only too glad of his assistance as the crowd were streaming through the gates. Beatrice would have been rather less than woman if she had not longed to go to Hugh, and judge of his real condition with her own eyes. A man is so chary of the details by which the feminine sex set great store. A slight concussion was terribly vague—it might be a euphemism for a fractured skull, bringing lasting injury to speech and intellect, and what would life be worth, denied of its mental powers!

Forrester utterly engrossed with Flora Vivian, who had come to the match at his earnest entreaty, was attempting to convey to her ready mind some idea of the pleasure it had given him to know that she was looking on. With that pretty blushing face upturned to his, he forgot everything else, and never noticed that the pressure of the crowd had forced Lady Falconer to drop behind him. Bewildered and confused, unable to discover the Clifford liveries in the fast decaying light, she looked over the sea of strange faces hoping to find a friend, but not one could she recognise.

"I never knew a fellow before kick the ball into goal, and himself into 'Kingdom Come' by the same stroke. I'd have given a pony to see it." The voice was her husband's—the words froze her blood. As Lester, the man he was talking to, exclaimed in frank disgust, "Falconer, you are the cold-bloodedest brute I ever came across," Beatrice shrunk shudderingly away—anywhere, anywhere out of her husband's sight or contact. In a wild hurry to be gone, she plunged recklessly into the road where the traffic was thickest.

She heard a cry, a volley of angry curses, the jingle of harness was close to her ears—the hot breath of a horse was close to her face, when a firm clutch was placed on her shoulder, which dragged her back on to the safe shelter of the kerb. Then a sudden faintness came over her, and she seemed to be slipping down into nothingness through a thick mist.

His own wife—that was the joke of it—and not somebody else's! Falconer looked down into the pale, pure face with a stupid bewilderment on his own. This was the woman whom he had pursued to the Royal Club with the fiercest anger in his heart; and instead of bullying her into submission, he had saved her life! If he had not stretched out his arm in time, that young lithe body would have been hideously mangled by the hoofs of the Baron's high spirited thorough-breds, and he himself would have been wifeless—his married life a closed chapter! These thoughts whirled through his brain, while Forrester, appalled and apologetic, pushed his way through the crowd, eager to make up for his past negligence, and the throng pressed closer and closer, and voices hoarse or shrill advanced opinions as to whether the lady was "gone dead, or only wounded," and a policeman cried "Stand back," an order which nobody obeyed, for curiosity was stronger than obedience.

After two minutes, which seemed the length of ten, the brougham was brought up as the Baron's carriage moved on, and Beatrice was lifted into it by her husband's strong arms. Flora looked up into his unresponsive face with widely dilated eyes. "What is it? What has happened to her?" she asked breathlessly, but entirely engrossed with his own thoughts, Falconer only grunted "Home" with a glance at the coachman, and shut the door with a bang.

"An infernally near thing!" remarked Captain Lester, as he threw away his cigar. "Never saw a closer shave in my life."

Falconer did not answer. He was experiencing a sudden revulsion of feeling, and it was difficult for him to sort his emotions.

On arriving at Curzon Street, and inquiring for his wife, Simons had simply informed him that her ladyship had gone out driving at two o'clock: but James, the second footman, when he brought a brandy and soda to the smoking-room had imparted the further information that her ladyship had gone to the Royal Club to see a football match in which Captain Pemberton was playing.

Instantly his jealousy caught fire, and without waiting for anything but a hansom, he started off in pursuit.

As he went he prepared some choice sentences to growl out at his wife, as soon as he found her. He could easily taunt her with this new craze, for he had never known her take an interest in football before, and he could say many scathings things about that "confounded prig." He would not make a scene if he could help it, but he would bring her away with him by force if she wouldn't come without, pack her into the brougham and send her straight home. He would stand no nonsense—by which he meant that he would have his own will, and give no one else a chance. He would show her that she had to obey him whether she liked it or not, as if he were a policeman with a resolute government behind him.

He had made his programme, but Fate drew her pencil through every line. The match was over when he drove up to the gates, and as he jumped out, he heard it confidently asserted that Pember-ton was dead, gone too far for even his long arm to reach him. This was the first check.

Then he came upon Lester, who hooked his arm in his, and they went on together, scanning the crowd in search of Lady Falconer. Then the accident happened, and he saw a girl in the act of falling under the horses' hoofs. That girl was his wife and he had saved her. This was the second check. All his rage had quieted down as she rested helplessly in his arms, in the utter self-surrender of unconsciousness. She looked so pure—so entirely different to the bold-eyed women with whom he had lately been surrounded, he could not doubt her—no, doubt was a positive absurdity!

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"Tell you what, Falconer?" Captain Lester went on in his blundering good nature, "You ought to give her more rope. You take a precious long length yourself."

"Dry up," said Falconer fiercely, and shaking him off as if he were an insect, he walked on alone.

CHAPTER XLI.

WHAT CAME OF IT.

"GOING on splendidly," that was Townshend-Rivers version of Hugh Pemberton's condition, on the scrap of a note which he sent in to Lady Falconer during the course of the evening. It was to say the least an optimistic view of the situation, for the patient was still in a comatose state, incapable of speech or movement; but Townshend-Rivers saw no reason why he should not try to reassure Lady Falconer because Hugh persisted in giving the lie to his words. It would do the fellow no good to have her sobbing out her poor little heart for him a few yards off in Curzon Street, and it would certainly do Lady Falconer a great deal of harm.

Taking a psychological interest in some of the pretty women with whom he came in contact, he made the most of the situation from his highly sympathetic point of view; and arrived at the romantic conclusion that the dragoon's danger would be the Countess's despair. He knew so much of this especial ménage in Mayfair that he was able to gauge the whole range of possibilities as to the Earl's conduct.

If he found his wife bowed down with woe, and suspected that the woe was the direct product of Pemberton's misfortune, he was likely to behave with as much justice, mercy, and moderation, as a Matabele on the war-path. Beatrice would suffer terribly, and her sufferings would in no way advantage Hugh. Ergo, it was well to secure her peace, even at the cost of a white lie. So he told his falsehood with a light heart, and lightened the atmosphere in Clifford House considerably by so doing. The three friends had been engaged to dine with Lady Falconer and go to some theatre afterwards, but Val Forrester was the only one that turned up.

Townshend-Rivers, who had a kindly heart under his outward affectation of cynicism, remained on guard by Hugh's bedside, and Forrester, whom nothing but the barest necessity would have kept from another opportunity of seeing Flora Vivian, promised to relieve him later on. "Later on" leaves a wide margin.

"Look out, old chap—you will have something to tell me when you come back," Townie called after him as he thought of his French novel—the plot of which was fast developing.

"None of your chaff," Val replied, with an actual blush on his boyish countenance, preoccupied as usual with his own love-affair.

"I'd have given anything to have been there," the elder man said to himself, as he sat down again at his post with a regretful sigh. "It will all be wasted on that unfledged chick. The second act of a domestic drama passing before his very eyes, and he will make nothing of it; won't have a thought to spare for anyone but his Phillis. What a wasted opportunity!"

Then he scrutinised Hugh's face with an anxious eye. Frankly speaking, if he had thought of such an imprudence, he did not like the look of it at all. The eyes were fast closed, but the sharply defined brows were drawn together in an almost unbroken line, and this contraction could only be caused by acute pain, or severe pressure on the brain. He grew desperately uneasy as he sat there in the silent room—doubly silent in contrast to the roar of Piccadilly close outside the double windows. The gloomiest of thoughts came into his usually cheerful brain. If this good young fellow died, there would be nobody in London who could take up his position with regard to Lady Falconer.

Galahads are not plentiful, in modern society at least, whatever they were when the world was younger and nearer the age of innocence. Geoffrey Talbot had attempted the rôle of Lancelot—and failed. Townshend-Rivers had not been told a word about it, but he knew it by induction. He knew it from the beginning when Geoffrey tried to induce Beatrice to join a society called "The Affinities," which was got up by those of the smart set who considered themselves the "fine fleur" of the intellect and the wit of the day.

Beatrice had laughingly refused to be his affinity, or that of anyone else, and in spite of the supplications of many of the male members she had kept herself sternly aloof. "She is one in a thousand," Townshend-Rivers decided, for to his certain knowledge no other woman could have been placed in a position of fiercer temptation; and yet she had stood firm, and held her dainty head so high that she could not see the mire at her feet.

And Hugh Pemberton, her one friend, lay there like a log, unable to lift a finger for her aid, her comfort, or her consolation, adding a new anxiety and even terror to the troubles of her life. "It's a queer world," he said to himself, "Things are so generally topsy-turvy that it wouldn't surprise me to be standing on my head."

The trained nurse arrived, and relieved him of his self-imposed duties ; but it was too late to go to Curzon Street. He had a very late dinner at his club, played a game of billiards with his old chum, smoked a good many cigarettes, and finally went back to Pemberton's rooms, where he was joined by Forrester about midnight.

Val had not much to tell, but stood on the rug in front of the stone fender, with an extinct cigar in his hand, and what Townie in his secret irritation called "an idiotic grin" on his lips. It was impossible to drag anything out of him, so poor Townshend-Rivers gave it up in despair. Presently Forrester remarked in an awe-struck tone ; "Do you know Falconer was disappointed—actually *disappointed*, when he found this poor old chap hadn't done for himself."

"What did he say?" with renewed eagerness.

"It was when we had a smoke together—awful bore—would drag me out, and I came back to find the box chock full—not a chance of speaking to anybody."

"Yes, yes,—"*impatiently* ; "moths always object to a shade round a candle. What about Falconer?"

"He began about football being almost as bad as a fight—so much damage done. Then he said something as if Pemberton had slipped the hooks, and when I answered, 'Not half so bad as that. Hope he will pull through in a fortnight,' there was a gleam in his eyes, a positive glare of rage. He looked as if he would have knocked me down with the greatest pleasure."

"I don't doubt it. The beast predominates in Falconer, and he is nothing more than a two-legged tiger."

"But why should he hate old Hugh?"

"Why shouldn't he?" said Townie quietly. "Virtue and vice are always antagonistic. Anything been heard of the Uncle?"

"Out of town—Lady Falconer said she had telegraphed."

The two men presently went home, finding that they could do no good to the patient by a longer stay. Hugh was left to the care of the nurse, who had nothing to do but to wait and watch. She did not think very seriously of the case, but as she looked at the young soldier in his helpless inactivity, she wondered if this accident had come like a full stop in the midst of a busy life. If idleness meant ruin to his career, destruction to his fortune, the ruthless blighting of his dearest hopes, it would be all the same. He was in the hands

of a greater power than any mundane sovereignty, and until that hand was taken off him, he was as powerless for good or evil as any mummy in its forgotten grave. He must lie there without raising a finger, or uttering one word—though action or speech might prevent some fearful catastrophe—he must lie there, silent and immutable even if the whole fabric of his worldly desires were toppling in ruins about his golden head.

“Poor fellow,” sighed the nurse with the vivid sympathy which was the natural outcome of her devoted life, “I hope nobody is tangling the skein for him whilst it has dropped from his fingers.”

CHAPTER XLII.

FALCONER'S IDEAS OF EDUCATION.

HUSBAND and wife were both on the watch with eyes and ears as keenly alert as those of a dog left in charge of property, whether the latter consisted of a master's glove, or a house full of people and chattels. Beatrice was doubting if she ought not to send Flora off by the first train the next morning, to save her from the chance of unpleasantness; and yet feeling, as she looked from her pink cheeks to Val's glowing eyes, that it would be hard to break off a love story at the end of the first volume.

Falconer, on the other hand, whilst outwardly amiable, was watching with the utmost keenness for any sign of a broken heart about his wife. Fortunately her great anxiety had been relieved by Townshend-Rivers' mendacious note, so that she could preserve an outward composure, and make herself agreeable whenever the much engrossed Val had a crumb of attention to bestow on his hostess. Falconer looked at her in complacent astonishment.

Pemberton was dead—and “she didn't turn a hair.” She could not have cared a brass farthing for him, or else she was the best actress he had ever seen. Which was it? An immense deal depended on the answer. By the end of the evening he was beginning to imagine that his suspicions were on the wrong tack. She certainly had cared for the fellow as a friend, if nothing more, and yet he was dead, and she was just as chirpy as ever.

Everybody had been impressed with the conviction that Pemberton was her one safe friend. His aunt told him long ago in the plainest language that he would be a fool if he attempted to *chasser* him. The Bishop had implied that he, Falconer, could never have the smallest excuse for shutting the door in the dragoon's face; and yet Hugh Pemberton had been the one man whom he most feared as his own rival. The others had set him up on a pedestal because he was an old playmate, and consequently the oldest of friends, but for those very reasons Falconer felt that he was to be most distrusted. He began on a different footing with Beatrice to any of the rest, and therefore was likely to be the most dangerous.

But now all these fears had vanished into smoke. The fellow was dead, and on the very day of his death under peculiarly agitating circumstances, there was Beatrice looking splendidly handsome and enjoying herself pretty fairly at the theatre! He began to be disgusted at her heartlessness, but after all it was a convenient trait, and it would enable him to go off to America for that much talked of prize-fight, with a tranquil mind as to the wife he left behind him.

Then came the talk with Forrester, and all was changed. His security left him—the ground slipped from under his feet. Whilst he was imagining Pemberton safe out of the way for ever, his wife knew that he was only slightly hurt, and already on the road to recovery. This accounted for the composure of her bearing, and sent him back at the same moment into the whirlpool of jealousy.

Beatrice could not imagine what new cause of offence had brought such a depression in the mental barometer; but at the first sign of a cyclonic disturbance she made up her mind that Flora must go. Whatever was coming she must bear alone: but when she announced this decision in the small hours of the morning, Flora absolutely refused to obey her. She guessed intuitively that she was to be sent away for her own good, just when Beatrice was likely to want her most; and she asked indignantly if her friendship were of that shallow kind which dried up in the hour of trouble. Her remonstrances were so urgent, her refusals to "budge" so positive, that Beatrice at last, in spite of many misgivings, relented.

It was decidedly better for her sake that Flora should stay, for she was some sort of check on Lord Falconer, but Beatrice was not likely to be swayed by purely selfish considerations. Val Forrester was an important element in the matter. Her own experience

made her fastidious about the choice of husbands for her friends; but, after studying Forrester carefully, she was convinced that under no circumstances would he behave unkindly or roughly to a wife. He had steady principles, honest ambitions, a clean past, as far as she could tell, behind him—a bright future before him.

If it is true that in all men there is something of the brute, there could only be the least particle in Val. He was a thorough gentleman, and he was not ashamed of being a Christian as well, with no leanings towards either chilly agnosticism or vague theosophy. He would suit Flora Vivian better than any other man she had ever met, and he was therefore a prize which it would be a sad pity to lose by a sudden cessation of propinquity—that most powerful factor in all love affairs. With some misgivings she let her stay, and a life of complete unrest for them both began.

The next morning, after returning from church, delighted by the beautiful music, and cheered by the eloquent words of the preacher, Beatrice asked for her boy, and received the answer that she most dreaded—Lord Clifford was in the smoking-room with his Lordship.

She and Flora had gone round to Hugh's lodgings to inquire after him, so they reached home rather late, at the same time that some friends dropped in from the winter imitation of the Church parade; and they sat down to luncheon at once without waiting to take off their hats. Beatrice thought that the best way to get Cliff out of the smoking-room was to have luncheon, and her surmise proved to be correct, for no sooner had they taken their seats than the Earl came in, looking the impersonation of a fond father with his little son perched on his shoulder. It was a charming picture, the guests thought as they looked at the pair—the father with his splendid physique and handsome countenance, and his life's experience written on every line of it—the child beautiful as a cherub, unsullied innocence depicted on his baby face, and yet with a tiny spark of the devil in his reckless laughing eyes, as he clasped a glass ball he was forbidden to play with in one chubby hand, and held on with the other to his father's short black hair.

Falconer nodded to his friends, and walked straight up to the other end of the table, where his wife was sitting. He had brooded all the morning in sullen, morose uncalled-for rage—and this was the outcome of it.

Beatrice sat quite still, her eyes fixed on that tiny bundle of lace

and velvet with the bright head above it, as if it had the power of some snake to fascinate her. The buzz of conversation dwindled into silence. A feeling of expectancy was in the air. Falconer was a dark horse on which nobody ever felt equal to betting. He might do anything—or nothing. He was close to his wife now—already her lips were parting in a smile, as she raised her arms to receive her child.

An expression of low cunning shot across her husband's eyes, furtively he touched the glass ball, which slipped from the tiny hand on to the Turkey carpet. "Now then"—he whispered.

Clear and shrill rose the child's treble :

"Damn it—it's broke!" he cried with a jubilant laugh. But the ball was solid. The carpet was soft and the ball had not broken, though a mother's heart had.

The next moment the boy was on the floor—scrambling after his lost plaything. Falconer went back to his seat with a chuckle. The guests, to do them justice, felt disgusted and revolted, but began to talk as if nothing had happened, in order to cover an uncomfortable situation. Flora's eyes were fixed on the mother in eager sympathy, as she sat up with her utmost dignity, her shoulder slightly turned on her host. Beatrice was as white as the table-napkin which slipped down on to the floor, as she stood up. She caught Pickles in her arms, though he was much too heavy for her, and whisked him out of the nearest door, which some man opened for her.

"Leave the little beggar alone!" her husband called out as the door closed upon her. He showed some intention of getting up to interfere, but Milly courageously laid her pretty little hand on his arm to stop him. "Don't desert me," she said with a pout.

"Jolly little chap—isn't he?" he said as he changed his mind and kept his seat. "I'll make a man of him—before I've done with him."

"A monster more likely," she answered sweetly.

"That's distinctly uncivil," he objected grumbling.

"They are often synonymous," she answered with an ambiguous smile, whilst her neighbour spelt out the word "Heredity" on the spotless tablecloth with the point of his finger, and she glanced at it over her shoulder with instant comprehension of his meaning.

CHAPTER XLIII.

ALARMED.

BEATRICE was in despair. She could undergo anything, or she thought she could—if ill-treatment began and ended with herself. But to see her child's innocence deliberately soiled was more than she could possibly stand. Every instinct cried out against it. It was impossible to stand by and watch the work of degradation proceeding under her eyes, and yet she knew that as her husband had begun, so he would go on from bad to worse, and the sweet baby lips, that seemed to have the breath of heaven about them, would be profaned by the words that Falconer so often uttered, and scorched by the spirits he so habitually drank. Once the child had run to her, choking, spluttering, stammering, "Nasty 'tuff—nasty 'tuff—burnt Pickles!" And as she bent over him she knew that his father must have given him a sip of brandy out of his glass as if in sheer perversity of evil, he absolutely wished to make the boy follow in his steps, before he had discarded his baby shoes and velvet frocks.

Falconer's affection for the child, on the other hand, seemed to be the one humanizing sentiment he could feel, and Pickles would throw aside anything to run helter-skelter down the broad stair-case as soon as he heard his father calling to him. The little fellow was not in the least afraid of him, and when his father's face was looking as gloomy as a November sky, he would go up to him and clasp one of his legs with his small arms, begging with all the insistence of an unrestrained will, to be taken up on his shoulder at once. Sometimes he would avert a domestic storm by running in with his happy laugh, and serene unconsciousness of anything disagreeable. He was the sunbeam of the house, and yet a source of infinite trouble to his mother.

She was not half so afraid of the many illnesses which may befall a child, as she was of the moral blight with which he was likely to be infected by his father. How could she fight against the curse of heredity, when her influence was being undermined in every possible way? How could she sit with any peace of mind in her own comfortable den, if she suspected that her boy was perched on

the table in the smoking-room, his little nose growing fatally accustomed to the smell of spirits, his tiny sharp ears taking in the coarse blasphemies which ought never to have been uttered in his hearing? When she made a passionate appeal to her husband, he told her coolly that it was no business of hers. If it had been a girl he would have let her "molly-coddle" her as much as she liked, but as "it" was a boy he would have his own way with him, and she needn't interfere.

"Interfere!" she cried in an indignant remonstrance, all the instincts of motherhood wrought up in revolt against the insolence of the word. "You seem to forget that I am his mother!"

"Not a bit, but with me for his father you couldn't make him into an angel if you tried."

"I don't know that," she said gravely. "His soul came straight from the hand of God—that must be pure at least!"

"I know nothing about his soul, poor little chap, but his make, his face, his very hands and feet, are all a copy of mine—everyone says so. There's nothing of the canting Kennards about him," he concluded triumphantly.

"You are very civil," she said tersely, taking notice of the remark she cared for least, because the others held a truth which it was too painful to discuss.

"Cant is your particular hobby—your father's a preacher of it, and you try to stand in his shoes."

"If by 'cant' you mean religion—" throwing back her head—

"What you call religion—yes—" he interrupted. "But the whole thing's a gigantic humbug. You humbug yourselves first, and then you are death on taking in other people."

"The humbug is all your own," she said with intense bitterness—"You pretended to be a Churchman and a gentleman, when I married you, but you are neither."

"And I am both. The Cliffords date back to the days of Queen Bess—isn't that good enough for you? And as to the other thing—I'm not a caddish dissenter, and I'm not such a fool as to be an atheist. I know that I couldn't have made myself, so somebody must have made me."

"And so you call yourself a Churchman?" the utmost contempt in her tone.

"I should rather think I did," emphatically.

"And you expect that large amount of religion to carry you through life and death?"

"I don't trouble my head about that. I'm likely to live as long as other fellows, and I'm going to have a good time if I can manage it. You women, you've got to be religious, or else you fall into no end of mischief," he was good enough to add, with a nod to emphasize it, as he hurried away, suddenly remembering an appointment at Lincoln's Inn.

His thoughts rarely rose above horse-racing—gambling on the turf, or the green board, or the rarer excitements of the prize ring, but to-day they went on an unusual track. Some time or other this jolly sort of life would end, his eyes would lose their keenness, his muscles their vigour, his enormous strength would go from him. When he could no longer shoot, or hunt, or bet, or gamble, or make love, what then? All other fields of delight in the way of Art or Music were closed to him, for he had no interest in either. What then? the inner voice repeated in louder tones. When pretty eyes no longer looked into his, when women's voices no longer whispered tender words into his ears, when he himself used up—bored to death—without a single hope or illusion—had to face the stagnation of old age—what then? Pshaw! he might never live to be old.

He flicked his whip in the air over his horses' heads, and they sprang forward in their collars as if they were going to take him down Piccadilly in a hand gallop. But they soon had to moderate their pace, for there was some exhibition going on at Burlington House, a performance at the Egyptian Hall, etc., etc., and the road was thronged with vehicles of every sort. Presently the phaeton came to a standstill. There was a sudden block. Carts, carriages, and even the bustling and all important omnibuses stopped. Falconer supposed that Royalty was near at hand, or a troop of Life Guards going to rattle by, but it was only a humble walking funeral which was allowed to cross the road undisturbed, because Death takes precedence of Life.

For a few short moments, with cold hand upraised, he checks the every day bustle of the world. Falconer looked askance at the small train of unimportant mourners, but his careless glance stopped on the tiny coffin, as it struck him shudderingly that it would have been just the right size for Pickles. The pall was black and white,

and in the centre of the blackness lay an ill-made cross of white chrysanthemums. Flowers were dear at the time, and it was doubtless all that the sorrowing mourners could afford. But the pooriness of the cross seemed to offend him.

"Dirt cheap!" he said to himself. "Hang it all, they might have given him something better than that. Why does a child ever die?" He hated the thought of it. There were lots of fellows he knew who would be better out of the world than in it; the world even would profit by their absence, but a child could do no harm to anyone.

"Hi! Lester!" he bent forward eagerly, and beckoned to his friend who was looking in at a shop window. "Did you see that thing pass just now?" he asked as soon as Captain Lester, on his eager invitation, was seated by his side.

"Some poor little brat's first and last procession?" he answered carelessly.

"Yes, they ought not to let such a thing pass through the streets. I call it scandalous."

"That's good. Would you have a set of funeral balloons? Ha, ha, it would cost a pretty penny."

"I'm not such a lunatic," gruffly. "But they ought to manage these things better—get them over early in the morning—"

"Early this morning there was such a fog, ten to one they would not have spotted the grave. But I never knew you put yourself out about such a trifle before," looking up at him curiously. "How's the little chap?"

"Well as possible, why do you ask?" frowning.

"Thought there must be something up." Then with a quick change of subject, he asked where they were bound for.

"Lincoln's Inn, to see that old skinflint. After that, to the Pelican to find out when that confounded match is coming off."

The conversation drifted into matters concerning the prize-ring, and Falconer went back into a more usual phase of thought, in fact such a usual phase of commonplace coarseness that it need not be chronicled.

(To be continued.)

The Ideal House.

By JOHN STRANGE WINTER.

IN THE MATTER OF CONSERVATORIES AND HOUSE-PLANTS.

GENTLE READER—I am, practically speaking, bound to begin this paper with the words “gentle reader,” for it is a fact worthy of notice that when certain metaphorical pills have to be swallowed, certain phrases are almost invariably used as a gilding or sugar-coating. There is a well-known song, now a little, or I might more truly say a good deal out of date, which *indeed* was dear to the hearts of our grandmothers. It begins “Do not trust him, gentle lady; gentle lady, heed him not,” and tells an old old-story in verse of exceedingly halting character set to a singularly unlovely tune. I know an aged divine in London-town who always prefaces a request with the words—“Gracious Lady,” and it mostly has the desired effect until the fount of pity has run dry. A certain very distinguished actress, who graces both the stage and the social circle with her very dominant and virtuous personality, invariably begins a real disagreeable speech with the phrase “Dear lady;” and another of the same cult, who might be understudy to the first, copies her in this little idiosyncrasy with a fidelity which is simply ludicrous.

So in my case, I begin this chapter of Ideal House with words which foretell at once an apology and a warning. My warning is that my readers must not look in this article for an abbreviated essay on the care of a conservatory, and my apology is for venturing into this region at all. I am’ no gardener. I dearly love a green-garden in my house, and I am rather lucky with my plants, but I could not write a handbook on the care of house-plants any more than I could write a treatise on Coptic, or on the language spoken by the Choctaw Indians.

I would advise any Angelina whose experience of house-plants is limited, to treat herself to a shillingsworth of advice such as can be had from several well-known publishing houses. My friend, Mrs. Chamberlain, is a great authority on all sorts and conditions of

gardening, and knows all that there is to know about green things both indoors and out. Not for worlds would I in my ignorance trench upon her experienced knowledge, and what I am going to say about conservatories and indoor plants will not in any way trench upon the same ground as that dealt with either in Mrs. Chamberlain's writings or in those of any other recognised authority on the subject. For I am going to speak on the decorative not the technical aspect of the conservatory, and I take it that it lies well within my province to speak on such a matter.

We will take it for granted that our Edwin and Angelina have acquired a house with a special place for the care of plants. Then first let me beg of Angelina—for it is usually the wife who arranges the conservatory—as her first and most special rule to make her conservatory a place for keeping her plants in and nothing else. It is the fashion in some London houses to transform the conservatory into an eastern lounge to be used for smoking purposes. Well and good, but in that case make it a lounge and no more—do not attempt to combine the two, gentle Angelina, don't put any Japanese fans as a “pretty” background to your ferns, nor decorate the walls with the worst and most broken portion of your china collection. You might as well attempt to art-decorate your lawn or your back-yard.

Personally I object to lounging chairs in a conservatory unless it is a very spacious one, large enough to have sufficient room to ensure that one has no contact with the plants and does not get damp.

In an ordinary London house the conservatory is such that there is no chance of putting chairs therein; it is generally a mere slip of a place taken off the width of the landing midway between the hall and the first floor. It is always grimy and frequently of an icy coldness, enough to kill most of the green things put to live in it. In the coldest weather it is generally shut carefully off from the house by protecting doors, because Edwin and Angelina do not like draughts. It does not matter much if Edwin and Angelina are country folk who only spend the season in a London house. In that case they will very wisely send to some respectable florist and make a bargain for the keeping of their house-garden in beauty while their stay lasts. But for the young couple who live in the house all the year round, and who do not house-keep by the mere giving of orders, this is not a practical way of doing. Angelina must see to her conservatory herself.

Let me therefore advise her not to attempt to make for herself a joy in that way without starting aright. She must first see that her conservatory is daintily tiled, and there should be a ledge at the door which will prevent any damp from flowing into the house. I rather like plain linen blinds, without any tassels or fringes, but I abhor any form of curtains or drapery. Don't, dear Angelina, if you have a large and lofty palm as a centre-piece to your green-show tie a sash round the pot thereof. A sash for a flower-pot is only permissible in a drawing-room when you cannot afford an ornamental flower-pot and happen to have several old sashes which will hide the rough pot in which the plant is growing. You know that nowadays you can get a large blue, green or yellow pot for about three shillings. Failing that much, you can buy a coarse red earthenware breadpan with handles, and enamel it any colour you choose; and this will not cost more than a few pence. I am not what the boys call "death" on enamel for the house—it carries upon it all too plainly the trail of the amateur—but there are times when such makeshifts are permissible. For instance, here in France, I can find nothing of a *cachepot* under ten francs—equal to eight shillings—and I have enamelled in turquoise blue, to my great satisfaction, some of the common red earthenware cooking pots of this country. It has cost but a mere trifle for about a dozen of them; but they leak a bit if water is left to stand in them, and I make them as little prominent in my salon and hall as may be. To guard the tables on which they stand from water-stain I utilise any old pieces of *toile ciré* that I possess, and am well pleased with the result.

Equally I would condemn for any permanent house, ideal or otherwise, the muslin which is called by the name of Liberty, as part and parcel of a conservatory. Liberty muslins are often exquisite in colour and design, and may be used in fifty ways, each one to advantage. But draped about a conservatory, Liberty, or any other muslin or fabric, is nothing more nor less than a horror to all rightminded people. To keep plants in good order they must be freely watered and they must remain in a warm moist atmosphere, such as is good for neither people nor fabrics; *ergo* have nothing in your conservatory that can in any way be spoiled or affected injuriously by that atmosphere.

If Angelina wishes to be really successful I think she will have

a tank for water and a tap placed above it at one end of her house-garden. I would suggest that she has a short length of gutta-percha tubing, adjustable to the tap, and fitted at the end with a rose such as will send a fine spray to any part as may be wished. Under the tank a small stove might be set—say a cheap and homely Beatrice, for I suppose if I ventured to say a gas stove, I should have all the gardeners down upon me. This would in winter, at a very trifling cost, keep the little house at an evenly warm and moist temperature, and in this, with ordinary luck, many charming green things will grow and flourish exceedingly.

Let me recommend Angelina to begin modestly, to learn to creep before she runs. Let her not despise the common aspidestria because those who keep milk-shops know that it is one of the hardiest plants that can be trained to withstand a London winter. Don't, Angelina, sneer at india-rubber plants—they are beautiful, with their broad green glossy leaves and tall straight stems. So are the lighter tinted castor-oil plants and the rougher kinds of palms. Then, too, there are many kinds of hardy ferns, and by the enterprising a delightful border to surround a conservatory can be made of the most ordinary species. For instance, suppose that our Angelina has four or five shelves around the walls of her little garden-house—in each of them the pot will be hidden by the green of the plants on the shelf below. But the lowest shelf of all needs some special arrangement, some kind of trimming as it were. Don't have cork or bark—it means earwigs and such objectionable things. Have a set of flower-boxes running the entire length of the shelves, which can be faced with tiles or with that smart railing which is sold for ornamenting the edge of dados. In these boxes, which should all have adequate drainage, may be planted a variety of things—creeping jenny, stone-crop, ice-plants, small hydrangeas, mother-o'-thousands, lobelias and even balsams, which should be nipped when about six or eight inches high to prevent straggling. Hyacinths and various kinds of lilies may take their turn along with tulips and the ever fragrant musk.

This border must not be placed lower than the bottom of the window, and will be, with a little care, a never ceasing joy to the house-mistress, and the admiration of her friends. Above can come the several tiers of shelves, or if such an arrangement is not possible from this border can rise the various schemes for placing the plants.

For instance, supposing that the conservatory boasts of an entire glass side, or rather of three windows placed together, Angelina might have the border as I have suggested, and between each window what might be described as a *panache* of plants, rising one above the other to the very ceiling. In front of each window a large wire basket might hang, the effect of which would be excellent. At each side of the doors, allowing Angelina a space to step in, there might be a rather tall circular stand which I would recommend to be of wire, the best and cleanest, and these might be filled with all manner of easily reared plants.

Let me assure Angelina that a well-kept conservatory gives a style to a house that can never be obtained from all the rags and tatters which can be bought in Regent Street. But she must no more think of leaving her plants undusted than of leaving her baby's face unwashed. She must no more dream of leaving her green things without air, warmth and water, than of letting her dog or her cat go hungry and thirsty. A conservatory needs but little attention but it needs it regularly, and that is one of the chief secrets of success with the plant world.

What funny things one sees as one goes through life! Not long ago I saw a superb conservatory with a great domed roof, a regular winter garden, such as filled me with envy. The floor was tiled, doors led into the principal reception rooms, the surround of window boxes was very large, and tall plants towered high over my head. It was charming—it might have been a paradise, but, alas! the central note of all was a spiral staircase of ornamental iron-work, and this was carefully draped from top to bottom with a much-washed drapery of red and white chintz! One could only say with the great Rachel—" *Hélas!* "

(*To be continued.*)

George Wilson, M.D.

By HORACE WYNDHAM

"MARION, dear, I want to introduce Mr. Wilson to you."

It was Mrs. L'Estrange speaking. The tall graceful girl, leaning idly against the trunk of an elm, a tennis racket in her hand, was watching the players languidly. It was much too hot to play, too hot to do anything almost, but sit in the shade and eat strawberries.

"Mr. Wilson, my niece, Miss L'Estrange. Marion, Mr. Wilson is going back to India in September, and thinks of sailing in the Chunda—the same ship as your own, you know. As you may be fellow travellers, you ought to know each other."

"Delighted, I'm sure, to have the opportunity," replied her new acquaintance, in the conventional manner of the conventional young man of the day. Somehow, something in the tone of his voice attracted Marion's attention. She turned round to shake hands. With a faint, half-stifled gasp, her hand fell to her side.

Mr. Wilson was a native!

In a moment, however, she recovered herself, and greeted him heartily enough. Her aunt fluttered away to attend to other guests. Presently they were chatting together as if they were old friends. Her instinctive repugnance to his nationality speedily vanished under the charm of his conversation. He talked well, certainly, and, moreover, interested her. How odd it seemed, though, that she should be talking so confidentially to a, well—person of colour.

"I hear you are going out to the shining East, Miss L'Estrange," he remarked. "What part do you intend to visit?"

"Well, you can hardly call it a visit. The fact is I mean to live there."

"To live there? Do you mean altogether?"

"Yes, for some time at any rate. Why not? I must tell you, Mr. Wilson, that I am going out as a medical missionary. The condition of women in India is an unhappy one. I don't want to boast, but I think that Englishwomen, who have been medically trained, can do a great deal for them. I have pledged myself for five years in the service of the London Medical Mission. My station is to be Myndoonie, in Eastern Bengal."

"How odd!" replied her companion, "Myndoonie's my destination as well. I've been walking the hospitals here for some time, and now that I've got my M.D. I mean to go back to my paternal home. I was brought up near Myndoonie, and, as I'm known there, I think it's the best place to settle in. I have a good deal of Malay blood in me, certainly, but I'm practically a Hindu. I'm afraid you'll find it rather lonely, though, as I do not think there are any white women in the district. The climate is against it."

"That won't discourage me, Mr. Wilson," answered Marion, "besides, I'm going for work, not for company."

"You'll get plenty of that, Miss L'Estrange. Still, it's a good thing to have both. Well, I must say goodbye now, or rather *au revoir*."

* * *

Somehow or other, Marion L'Estrange seemed to see a good deal of Mr. Wilson during the few weeks that elapsed before the eventful day in September arrived, on which she was to sail. Her aunt, too, seemed rather to encourage his visits, and that gentleman himself, finding so cordial a welcome awaiting him, seemed nothing loth to avail himself of the opportunity of calling two or three times a week at The Laurels. Marion, with a feminine instinct, as to the particular inducement of these frequent visits, took the opportunity of absenting herself on two or three occasions. Her aunt, however, looked at it in a different light, and gave her to understand that she expected her to assist in entertaining the guest.

"He will be very useful to you when you are in India," she explained. "English ladies don't travel much out there, I'm told, and if you happen to want anything from Calcutta or Madras, for instance, I've no doubt he will be glad to get it for you."

The good lady, in her truly British fashion, seemed to be under the impression that India was about the same size as her own little Hertfordshire village, only not quite so important a portion of the universe, and that the capitals of the Presidencies were within a few hours' journey of each other.

Gradually it became clear, even to the slightly obtuse minded Mrs. L'Estrange, that the real object of Mr. Wilson's constant visits was the idea of entering the estate of Holy Matrimony with her niece. He had enlarged with great pertinacity on the desolate nature of the lives of single English ladies in that country, and the almost imperative necessity for their being married.

At first she refused altogether to entertain his propositions for a moment, but, by degrees, he succeeded in inducing her to listen more favourably, and, eventually, she gave him her promise to do her best to further his cause with her niece.

When the subject was first broached to Marion, she felt all her old repugnance to his race rise anew within her. By degrees, however, she dismissed such thoughts as unworthy, and came to the conclusion that, in marrying a native, she would, after all, be only doing what was being done everyday. Besides, a great point in his favour was that he was of the same faith as herself. Educated in a missionary college, he had been brought up a Christian from his childhood. He was clever enough to advance, as a reason for their union, that, by becoming his wife, her own particular work would be rendered much more effectual.

"I must tell you, dear," he said, one day, "that if you were single out there, or even married to a European, you wouldn't be able to enter any of the native women's quarters. They are much too jealously guarded. As my wife, however, you will be able to go where you like. You will be able to do a great work."

This prospect, coupled with her aunt's entreaties, at length decided her. But, before the marriage took place, an event occurred which upset her more than she cared to think.

Her cousin, Francis L'Estrange, who, when they were both children, had been her playfellow, came home on a short furlough from his Indian tea-garden, and came down to The Laurels one day to say good-bye. His mother told him of the projected marriage.

"I must see Marion at once," he said, when she had finished, "where is she?"

"In the garden, I think, dear. Promise me, my boy, that you won't try to alter her decision; her mind is made up, and it's all for the best, I'm sure."

Out into the shady old garden strode Francis L'Estrange with a white strangely drawn face. Could this be true? His beautiful Marion going to marry a beastly nigger? He would rather see her in her grave first. Sitting in a low wicker chair, under a spreading clump of rhododendrons, he came across her. As he approached, she dropped her book, and looked up with a start.

"What is it, George? Oh! I beg your pardon, Francis, I didn't recognise you at first?"

"Who's George?" he demanded, "the nigger, I suppose." Then losing all restraint, he burst out passionately—

"Look here, Marion. Is it true that you are going to marry a nigger? For God's sake tell me it is not. Surely, there's time, even now, to change your mind. Give up this nonsense about a career in India—it's not the place for white women—and send that black beggar about his business. You don't mean to say that you—you love him?"

The girl stood erect, with flashing eyes, and her lip curling angrily. "I don't know by what right you presume to speak to me in this manner, Francis. Mr. Wilson is not a nigger, as you have the bad taste to call him; he is a native gentleman—a Hindu—and one whom I sincerely respect. When you know that I am to marry him, it should be sufficient for you. And as for my going to India, it is to do the Master's work," she added in a softer tone.

"The Master's work be—well—blanked. It is the Devil's work," he answered hotly. "You must forgive me, Marion," he went on more gently, "but you really don't know what your marrying a native means. I've lived in India, and I've seen so many such cases, and know the utter misery, and even worse, that always follows such unnatural unions. I am really speaking in your own interest. At one time, dear, I had hope of another plan for you, of a time when you and I should be together. There is yet time to change your mind. For your dear sake, give up the idea."

"Thank you, Francis. I know what you are referring to, but it can never be. I am sure that you mean well, but my mind is already made up, and I cannot turn back now. I am sure that you are quite mistaken in the prejudiced view that you take."

"God grant it, although I'm sincerely afraid," he continued impudently to himself, "that the Devil will have something to do with it."

A footstep fell upon the gravelled path. Marion looked up, and gave a little cry. George Wilson stood beside her chair, half hidden by the shadow of the tree. Francis looked at him fixedly. How much had he heard? Apparently nothing, for his face seemed quite expressionless. Francis could make nothing of him. "It's always the way with these black beggars," he murmured to himself, "you can never tell what they're really up to."

Marion recovered herself immediately, and introduced the men.

"George, this is my cousin, Mr. L'Estrange. He has just come to say good-bye to me."

Mr. Wilson shook hands cordially enough. Still, Francis couldn't get rid of the idea that there was a half concealed gleam of malice in his eyes, and a suppressed passion in his voice, as he greeted his fiancée. Soon he took his leave, sick at heart at the manner in which his plans had been frustrated.

* * * *

On the first week of September they were married. It was a quiet wedding, and Mrs. L'Estrange, and the curate who performed the ceremony, were the only friends present. Marion's relations had held strictly aloof, sternly refusing to compromise themselves, one way or the other. On the whole, however, they rather approved of it. The withdrawal of a pretty girl, like Marion, gave their own less favoured progeny considerable more chance of securing the few eligible *partis* that the neighbourhood boasted. She had no parents, poor girl, and felt her loneliness at this time, very much.

* * * *

One day, about twelve months after these events, young L'Estrange in his bungalow at Chattapoonie, received a letter from his mother, which disturbed him not a little.

"Can you tell me," she wrote, "Marion's present address? I have not heard from her for over five months, although I have written several times. Find out what it means, if you can. I am very uneasy about it. Have they left Myndoonie?"

"Not heard from Marion for more than five months!" What on earth did it mean? This must be looked into at once. Fortunately, his partner in the estate was coming back in a day or two, and he would be able to take a few weeks' leave. The contemplated trip to Calcutta must be given up. He could go later on.

At the end of the week L'Estrange went to Myndoonie, and commenced inquiries immediately. It was a wretched Bengal fever and famine stricken district, chiefly populated by half-starved ryots. No one apparently knew anything about Mr. and Mrs. Wilson.

A long continued draught had devastated the neighbourhood, and the few Europeans, who for their sins, lived in the place, had long since sought the more congenial climate of the hills. A thought struck him! Could she be dead? After some trouble, he found the official who acted as a Registrar, and from his books, ascertained

that this, at any rate, was not the case. From him he also learned, after much questioning, that Marion and her husband had arrived there in October, but had left in the following April. As to where they had gone, he could not inform the sahib. Allah was great, and he, Sham Sing, was his honour's faithful servant.

L'Estrange very heartily cursed him, and his ancestors, for several generations, for an incompetent idiot, and journeyed back to Chattapoonie by easy stages.

One evening it chanced that he selected as his halting-place the village of Patipur. Tired out by his journey, and sick at heart at the fruitless result of his mission, he made his way to the *dak* bungalow, where he intended to put up for the night.

The kitmaghar received him with open arms, and assured him, as was his custom, that he was his father, and also his mother, and, what was more to the point, that there was a vacant bedroom, although the bungalow was just then unusually full.

Not feeling inclined for company, Francis dined alone, but, later on, went out to his verandah to indulge in a final cheroot. Three men, reclining comfortably in lounge chairs, looked up for a moment as he entered, and then continued chatting. L'Estrange declined to join them, or even to accept a peg when offered, and they accordingly put him down, like true Anglo-Indians, as an ill conditioned Yahoo, and talked disjointedly among themselves.

As he sat by himself in the shadow, brooding over the mystery surrounding Marion and her husband, a half caught fragment of their conversation caused him to rouse himself.

"One of the queerest things I've known in all my experience of the country," one of them, a callow youth of twenty-three, a civil servant of about two year's standing, was saying—

"Did you know her then?" asked his companion, who was in the Police.

"I met her, first of all, just after she came out, and I could see then that her amiable husband had already commenced to display the cloven hoof. The Ethiopian, we are told, on competent authority, cannot change his skin, and, by the same token, his nature cannot be expected to alter with his surroundings. He may get a veneer of civilization by contact with such superior people as ourselves, for instance, but it soon wears off when he gets back to his natural surroundings. He's bound to return, sooner or later, to his

original elements. It's always the way, and it's a mystery to me what possesses a white woman to marry a native. Her people ought to be prosecuted if they don't interfere. George Wilson, M.D., is about as nice a specimen of the genus blackguard as you'd meet with in many a long day's march."

L'Estrange could restrain himself no longer. Jumping up, he exclaimed, excitedly—

"Excuse me, you fellows, but I think you are talking of some one I know. My name's L'Estrange, and Mrs. Wilson, of whom I think you are speaking, is a cousin of mine. I've just come back from Myndoonie, where I've been to look for her. Can any of you tell me where she and her husband are just now?"

He of the Police looked at him meditatively.

"Poor devil!" he remarked, under his breath.

"My friend, Mr. Dixon, can probably tell you as much as anyone," he continued, introducing the men.

It was not much that he could tell him, after all. Open competition for the Indian Civil takes the edge off the average man's intellect, while those who manage to get through become little more than machines.

Dickson related his tale as if it were an official return that he was compiling, the recital of which nearly drove L'Estrange frantic. Briefly it amounted to this.

The Wilsons had come out in October, and, as previously arranged, settled in Myndoonie. Here the husband had commenced to practice. Family influence, however, had soon induced him to relinquish this, and to adopt the more dignified course of living as a native of wealth and position—his father being of royal blood—on the work of others. Under this arrangement it naturally followed that his wife could not, for a moment, be permitted to carry out her plan of ministering to the native women. In her loneliness and heartache at her husband's neglect, and fast lessening affection, she had formed the acquaintance of an English officer, named Trevor.

George Wilson, meeting them together, on more than one occasion, became imbued with the idea that his wife was forming a *liaison*. With the blind unreasoning passion of an Oriental, his jealousy was aroused, and he applied to her, in Trevor's presence, an insulting epithet. The Englishman promptly knocked him down, and yielding to Mrs. Wilson's entreaties, left the house,

thinking no more about the matter. The next morning he was found in the roadway, a few yards from their bungalow, quite dead and horribly mutilated. Suspicion fell on Wilson, who stoutly denied any knowledge of the circumstances of Trevor's death. Shortly after he reassumed his native name, and left the district, taking his wife with him.

"Can you tell me where they are now?" asked L'Estrange, when the other had finished.

The policeman looked at him curiously.

"Oddly enough—a mere coincidence, perhaps," he answered, "but they're living at Patipur just now. I should tell you that he calls himself by his native names and titles now, so you must ask for Lal Mohammed Khan, when you enquire for him. You must excuse me," he added after a pause, "but he's not too fond of Englishmen, so it's as well to be cautious if you're not exactly on visiting terms."

"Thanks," replied L'Estrange stiffly. "I can look after myself, but I fancy that Lal Mohammed Khan and I will have a little account to settle before we're many hours older. Good-night."

The silent man—he was in the Public Works—who had not hitherto taken part in the conversation, now delivered himself—

"I rather think," he remarked solemnly, "that our highly esteemed friend, the trusty and well beloved Lal, Esquire, is going to get rather worse than he bargains for. I imagine, moreover, that it will not be L'Estrange who comes off second best. Lal Mohammed Khan deserves to be cowhided, and I have an idea that he will be, and very effectively too. Allah is great, and L'Estrange is his instrument. I have spoken. Good-night."

Out into the open air, under the silver beams of the great cold Indian moon, strode Francis L'Estrange, along the road to the village. His heart was full of passion against this man, who had ventured to treat his kindred thus. In his anger, he hardly knew what he intended to do. It was a ticklish thing to interfere with another man's domestic arrangements—especially a native's—but this was an exceptional case. He thought of the motto of his race—*Facta non verba*—and tightened his grasp on his hunting crop.

He found the house without much difficulty. It was not much use, he thought, enquiring whether anyone was at home or not; it was best to find out this sort of thing for oneself. Accordingly he

passed through the half opened door, and entered the drawing-room the lights in the window of which had led him, when outside, to conclude to be occupied. At first he thought the room was empty, but a woman's figure, her head buried in a sofa cushion, sitting under a lamp at the far end, showed him his mistake. As he stood in the doorway, uncertain whether to enter or not, the low sound of muffled sobbing decided him. At his approach the woman turned round, and looked up.

"Marion, is it really you?" L'Estrange cried, doubting the evidence of his senses. Could it be possible that this tear-stained, sad-eyed looking figure could be the beautiful, peerless Marion that he had known and loved in former days? God in Heaven! What a change!

"Francis! Francis! Have you come at last?" she wailed. "Has God listened to my prayers? Or is He still forgetful? Oh, Francis, dear, say that you will stay with me, and not let—that man—come back. Do you know what he threatens to do this evening? He is going to sell me to his uncle, and send me to Persia."

"How has this change taken place, Marion? I thought you were going to be so happy?"

"I made a mistake, and I have suffered ever since. Almost immediately after my marriage with that—that man—I will not call him husband—I have been the victim of his persecution. Sometimes I almost think he is mad. It all begun from his blind jealousy, and the unreasoning enmity of his relations, who had expected him to choose a wife among his own people. He has made me wear native clothes; he has destroyed all my books, and lets me neither write, nor receive letters. For over six months I have not seen a white woman, or heard a word of English. And, oh, Francis, I can hardly say it, but he used to beat me, because I couldn't learn the native language."

"The swine! He will have to settle with me for this," Francis exclaimed fiercely.

"Hush! For God's sake! I hear him coming. Do nothing rash!"

The next moment, George Wilson, M.D., now more generally known as Lal Mohammed Khan, entered the room. Marion shrunk involuntarily into a corner. It was pitiable to witness her abject terror of her husband. L'Estrange's blood boiled as he saw it.

A scowl spread over the native's dark face, already enflamed with passion, as he recognised his visitor.

"Ah!" he remarked significantly, "it is really very good of you to visit my wife during my absence. An English custom, I presume? Pray don't leave us because I'm here. Don't let my presence interfere with your enjoyment."

"No," said L'Estrange, shortly, "don't flatter yourself that it will. I have something to say to you, though, that you may not care to hear."

"Pray don't consult me," he replied, mockingly, "I wish, though, that you could speak Bengali. I am rather out of practice in your own charming tongue. My dear wife is really now quite proficient in the vernacular. By the way, on a previous occasion I once had the pleasure of hearing your candid opinion of myself. It was in English, just before our marriage."

"I daresay you know quite enough English, you oily tongued hound, to understand what I am going to say. First of all, I am going to take the hide off your miserable nigger's body, and then I am going to place my cousin under my protection."

"You amuse me, my dear sir. What an extraordinary taste you must have. Do you really think that you will benefit my wife, by making her your—it is not an occasion to mince matters—mistress? Do you contemplate establishing a harem, may I ask?"

With a roar like a tiger after his prey, L'Estrange rushed upon him. Knocking him down with a crashing blow on the jaw from his fist, he avenged the foul insult.

The native slowly picked himself up, his mouth full of blood, and spluttering from his broken teeth. An expression of devilish malignity settled on his features.

"Better that you had never been born, than that you had raised your hand to one of my race, and polluted him by such contact," he exclaimed. L'Estrange turned his back contemptuously on him, and walked across the room to Marion. With a stealthy cat-like tread the other followed him, a keen-edged tulwar, which he had taken from the wall, concealed behind him.

As L'Estrange bent over Marion's seat, he raised the weapon for a stroke. In another moment L'Estrange's head would have been severed from his body. As he approached, she, half turning in her chair, saw his uplifted arm.

GEORGE WILSON, M.D.

"My God! Francis," she called out, warningly. "Take care, he is going to strike you down!"

Francis turned round just in time. Catching Lal Mohammed by the throat he managed to snatch the weapon from his hand, but not before it had inflicted a severe wound on his shoulder.

With an imprecation of baffled rage, Wilson caught up the reading lamp from the table, and hurled it at his wife. As he did so, he caught his foot in the rug, and, falling against the table, in his efforts to recover his balance, split his head against the sharp edge. Insensible from the effects of his fall, he lay helpless on the floor. The blazing oil, which fortunately had not touched his wife, ran along the matting towards him.

L'Estrange seized her in his arms. The shock of the struggle had rendered her unconscious, thus making her easier for him to manage. He must act before the servants arrived. Quick as thought, he jumped through the open window, with Marion's helpless form in his arms, leaving his adversary to his fate.

* * *

The cause of his death, and the burning to the ground of the house of Lal Mohammed Khan, was an inexplicable mystery to the neighbours of that gentleman for many a long day. A paragraph in the "Pioneer" from our own correspondent at Patipur was devoted to the case—

"We regret to announce," it ran, "the death of this well-known native gentleman, which occurred under circumstances of considerable mystery. It appears that his servants, on returning shortly after ten p.m. found the house in flames. The charred clothing of their master, which was recovered when the fire was subdued, is a mournful evidence of his untimely decease. It is thought that the outbreak was originated by some sparks from a firework display, which was being held by some children in a neighbouring compound

The mystery has been considerably added to by the fact, that neither the deceased gentleman's wife, nor an Englishman, who was seen by a *syce* to enter the house, have since been heard of. Lal Mohammed Khan was a gentleman of wide culture, and was a distinguished student of medicine, having obtained the degree of M.D. in England. His many good qualities, and charm of manner, endeared him to a large circle of friends, by whom his untimely death is sincerely mourned."

* * *

The circumstances concerning these events were never cleared up. The enterprising *syce*, who declared that he saw an English sahib enter the house and a *bhusti*, who reported that shortly after midnight, he had been nearly run over by a cart containing two ferringhees (foreigners) subsequently made an affidavit that it was possible they were mistaken. A certain police official, who was staying at the *ddk* bungalow at the time, hinted very strongly that they would best consult their own interests by keeping quiet about the matter. Moreover, he gave them to understand, that, as representatrix of the Empress, he had very serious doubts as to whether he would not have to hang them, as it was, for it was quite evident that they knew more than they ought to. The terrified natives thereupon swore solemnly that they were under the influence of drink at the time of the alleged occurrences.

Gradually the whole subject ceased to occupy any attention. Tablets of brass, and monuments of stone, commemorated the esteem in which the departed was generally held. Other causes for interest arose, and at length the whole affair degenerated into mere bazaar *gup*. Certainly the three travellers in the *ddk* bungalow held their peace about it.

Even when, some three years afterwards, they dined at the house of a Mr. and Mrs L'Estrange, in Cadogan Gardens, they never intimated, by word or deed, that they had ever met their host under other circumstances.

News filtered slowly down into English country districts. When Francis L'Estrange wrote from Calcutta, to say that Marion's husband was dead, and that he was bringing her home, his mother asked no questions, but put it down to the "fatal climate." Even the marriage of Francis and Marion she approved of after a time, although she confided to her that she considered such haste "positively indecent." Marion's refusal to wear mourning for her first husband, was always a source of wonder to her, as well as her unreasoning prejudice to India. She used to remark plaintively, "dear Marion was always so peculiar, you know." However, as Francis didn't seem to mind, she wisely gave up troubling herself about it.

In the Hour of Death.

By WINSTON KENDRICK.

PART I.

PÈRE AUGUSTIN and his little pupil, Chrétien de Montmartre, were about to sit down to the enjoyment of their simple evening meal. The boy had just placed the chairs by the table, and was gazing longingly at the dish of fresh salad he had gathered in the garden half an hour before, and washed with his own hands at the pump in the back kitchen, whence now came the clatter of Jeanneton's sabots as she moved slowly about.

Something else issued from the kitchen too, the odour of excellent soup, and Chrétien was hungry, very hungry. The sun was setting, and its long golden rays lay across the supper table, throwing the loaf of brown bread into inviting prominence, and dancing upon the lettuce-leaves, till they twinkled roguishly at the child. He was just going to peep in the kitchen, when Jeanneton appeared at the door, carrying a bowl. She was a pleasant-faced woman in a short blue petticoat, with a linen kerchief crossed over her brown bodice.

"Now, Chrétien, thou mayst call the Curé, and then sit thee down, like a good lad," said she.

The boy went to the foot of the ladder-like staircase leading into the little chamber above.

"Mon père, mon père, supper is ready," he called softly.

Père Augustin was occupied with his breviary, but he closed it at the sound of the young voice, and climbed down the rickety stair. Little Chrétien stood with folded hands behind his chair, while the priest asked a blessing upon the food before them, and then with a good will, the pair of friends fell to.

Jeanneton had taken her knitting to the porch, and the cottage was very quiet. The window of the little parlour stood wide open, and across the fields came the lilt of some peasant's song as he went cheerily homewards. Young birds were chattering in their nests in the great tree that flung its shadow across the flagged pathway. The daisies that Chrétien loved were closing their yellow eyes, and the scent of the May-blossom by the gate was heavy and sweet on

the air. Across the sky long shafts of crimson spread, and melted into golden islands above the west. The sun was giving one last look into the Curé's little room, and he lingered lovingly about the white bent head of the old man, casting a halo round his snowy locks. Then he kissed Chrétien's forehead, and went trembling away. The shadows grew longer and deeper, as night with dark fingers drew a purple pall over the heavens, and still there came no jarring sound to disturb the hushed solemnity that shrouded the declining day.

Père Augustin bared his head, and with thankful heart murmured a few brief words of praise for the peace and beauty of the evening hour.

It was an hour dear to both tutor and pupil, when the soul of each drew closer to the other, and when he who stood nearest to the river of death, pointed out more clearly the glories of the eternal land beyond its rolling stream. Here, hand-in-hand with the bright-faced lad, who, filled with the ardour of youth, pressed forward hopefully upon the road of life that his own feet had trod, the priest, while realizing the weakness and imperfections of humanity as the child could not, poured into his listening ears tenderest sympathy and counsel.

"See, mon père," cried Chrétien, gazing upwards in the dusk.

"There comes the first star! And look—another! Angel's eyes, are they not?"

"Aye, watching thee, my son. Be sure they never watch in vain. Look up to them always, believing that the good God sets them above thy path to keep thy feet from falling."

"Even when it is dark?"

"The more when it is dark, for then thou needst them most."

"But when the clouds are heavy, mon père?"

"His Angels always wait around His Throne. They are there, ready to come to thine aid, at His bidding, though thou mayest not see them. But Faith's eye can pierce the darkest cloud."

"Could *thine*, my father? Thou hast often told me that thou hast never known any great trial or temptation. If tested thus, dost think that thou wouldst fall?"

"Le bon Dieu be mine aid! I thank Him that hitherto I have been so blest, and should the hour of trial come, I trust *His* strength, not mine."

From the far distance the rumble of wheels now made itself heard, accompanied by the sound of horses' feet; a carriage was approach-

ing, and at a rapid pace. At first neither the old man nor the boy had noticed its advent, absorbed as they were in their talk, but now Chrétien put up a hand to his ear, and sprang to the window.

"A carriage and pair! They come this way. Mon père, can it be for thee?"

"Probably not, my son. The château of the Comte de Vocquesville is but two leagues on. The Comte keeps more carriage company than we."

"But the driver is slackening speed! He is turning down the lane. I can see the lamps, 'tis a grand carriage and pair, and a gentleman descends,—he is entering the garden."

"Stand back, my son. Do not let him see thee staring. Perhaps he needs but to ask his way."

But such was evidently not the stranger's intention. He rapped loudly on the door, and Jeanneton, who had returned to her duties, and was busy at the back of the house, now clattered along the passage. Her deaf old ears had heard no sound of wheels, and she peered up at the visitor, amazed. He stated that his business was with her master, and she flung open the parlour door accordingly.

"M. le Curé, you are wanted."

"Entrez, m'sieu," cried the priest cordially. "You are welcome. Stay, Jeanneton, we need the lamp."

"I am lighting it," replied the woman gruffly. "'Tis a late hour for callers, but the house of the prêtre must needs be open to all," she added mutteringly, for she rightly guessed that this would prove a summons for Père Augustin that he would not fail to obey; and as he rarely thought of himself, or his own comfort, and spent many a night out of his bed to sit beside that of a sick parishioner, it behoved her, she felt, to add no influence that would weigh the scale upon the side of duty. When she had finished her grumbling monologue, which the priest ignored with a mildly reproachful air, and the visitor with contempt, she clattered out of the room again, leaving the supper-table untouched, though she would fain have swept all the dishes off with her. A glance from the Curé however, compelled her to relinquish the intention.

"Pray be seated, sir. And what may I offer you? I trust you will partake of my humble fare. Jeanneton will warm some more soup directly." But the stranger stayed his host's kindly hospitality with a gesture.

"Do not trouble. Time is of importance, like my errand, though *that* need not take long to explain. First—the child I saw here—?" He glanced round the room in search of Chrétien, whom his quick eyes had immediately observed. But the boy had slipped away.

"My ward and pupil, Chrétien de Montmartre, the son of a friend, now, alas, dead. He has left us, knowing it is my wish that he should do so when I am engaged. You may speak freely, sir."

Thus reassured, the visitor loosened the wrapper, which, although it was not a chilly night, he wore closely confining his throat and mouth, and began to speak in a slightly halting accent.

"I come, M. le Curé, some distance, from one who stands in need of ghostly counsel. He is dying. His hours are numbered, and for reasons which I am not at liberty to give, but which he will no doubt explain to you as his confessor, should you undertake that office, I am here to beg you to come to him with all possible speed. Do not hesitate, or it may be too late. Think—a dying man, a soul in distress, claims your sympathy, your help, in his last awful moments. Of your charity, do not deny it."

Père Augustin was not the man to whom such an appeal could be made in vain. His kindly eyes glistened sorrowfully. He put out his hand, and laid it upon the stranger's arm.

"May the Master I serve, deny me mercy in my hour of agony if I neglect the call of a brother now. I come, sir, most willingly, but may I not ask whither?"

"I will tell you when we have started. See," and grasping the Curé's hand, his visitor pointed through the window.

"In that carriage sits one impatient of delay,—the dying man's son. And what think you he must feel, counting the moments that pass, and not knowing if his father yet lives or no."

"Enough—you have said more than enough, my good sir, I will come at once. Give me but time to obtain such things as I must bring with me, and to say adieu to my adopted child, and I am at your service."

"Be it so," said the stranger. "I will await you, M. le Curé, in the carriage, but hasten your movements, I beg."

Thus adjured, Père Augustin ascended to the sleeping chamber above, which Chrétien shared with him. Here he found the boy, and in a few words told him the object of the stranger's visit. To his surprise Chrétien clung round his neck, and burst into tears.

"Do not go, do not go, mon père, I beseech thee, do not go with the man!"

"Why Chrétien, my son, wouldst have me an unfaithful shepherd of the sheep? I *must* go. There is no doubt about the matter. Thou and Jeanneton must take care of each other till I return. 'Tis but for a night, my son. I shall be with thee in the morning."

"My father, forgive me," exclaimed the boy, "I am but a coward for thy sake. But my heart fails me, for thou knowest I have only thee."

He leant his fair head against Père Augustin's shoulder, and caught his breath, striving to check the sobs that broke forth in girlish fashion, till he was forced to bury his quivering mouth in the priest's sleeve. The good Père held him closely, touched to the heart by this unusual display of emotion.

"Come, this will not do. We are soldiers of the cross, thou and I, Chrétien, and we go where duty calls—to death, if need be. But we are not alone, else could I not leave thee. Cheer up, my son. Thou dost make a large matter out of a small one this time. For what is it, when all's said? Merely a summons to attend a dying stranger with the rites of Holy Church, that otherwise might be denied him. His emissaries are no brigands, come to carry me off. I shall be as safe with them as here in my own little bed beside thine. Wipe thy face, then, my son, and let me see a smile, before I go."

Bravely the lad struggled to comply, occupying himself in packing Père Augustin's vestments, and the miniature service he used for administering the last sacraments, into a little valise which the priest could easily carry in his hand. In five minutes all was ready. The horses were stirring restlessly below. The stranger was leaning upon the little gate. Chrétien could distinguish the outline of his dark form, and the boy shuddered involuntarily as he did so.

The lane lay in shadow, save for the glimmer of the carriage-lamps, but high up in the sky the pale crescent of the moon shone white and clear above the dusky forest that bound the horizon. Many a strange story had Chrétien listened to, told by the peasants of the neighbourhood of the wonders of that forest. In connection with it, gnomes and spirits, gipsies, elves, and bad men were inextricably mingled in his mind. Awful things had occurred at times within the remembrance of the villagers. Robberies, murders, and

other atrocities were attributed to the dwellers in the forest, whom no man dared brave, and whom it was reported no man ever saw, with the power of recognising them,—until too late,—to be what they were, banditti of the fiercest, most ruthless description. Occasionally these bad men ventured forth, bent on plunder, and woe be to the harmless peasant they encountered. He was known by his comrades no more, or if he returned amongst them it was to give utterance to tales garbled to such a magnitude of horror, that the credulous hearts of the simple villagers were vested with increased dread of the unknown band.

Brought up in an atmosphere of sentiment and superstition, it was impossible for Chrétien to remain unaffected by such stories, and doubtless the remembrance of them preyed unconsciously upon his mind. But he was a manly little fellow notwithstanding, and had too great a regard for Père Augustin's calling, and too sensible an appreciation of its exigencies, to permit his own foolish doubts and fears to escape him further. After all, who knew for a fact, that there really were any banditti? Père Augustin himself had often declared that there could be none. They lived in comparatively peaceful times, as the good Père often said, in recounting the terrors of the devastating sword of civil war that had swept the country in his boyhood, leaving many a fair home desolate. But now, the land was tranquil, and the power that had preserved them hitherto would protect Père Augustin to-night.

So Chrétien lifted a brave face for his friend's kiss, and parting blessing, and having watched him safely down the stair, he knelt down by the window. Père Augustin meanwhile called Jeanneton, and whispered a few words to her.

"Go up to Chrétien presently," said he. "The boy is not well. I think he has an attack of migraine. Give him one of your magic potions, Jeanneton, and take care of him till I come again."

"Aye, M. le Curé, that I will. God send it may be soon," quoth she.

"Amen," responded the priest, as he hurried to the gate. The unusual circumstance of his departure had not till then roused any uneasiness in his guileless breast, but now for the first time, a faint qualm struggled within him. The old woman's last words, intended as a benison, sounded rather like an ill omen.

The dark-cloaked stranger waited with his hand upon the carriage-

door, and motioning Père Augustin to enter, himself sprang after him immediately. Someone else was seated inside, who bowed silently in response to the Curé's diffident greeting. The horses dashed forward, impelled by a ready whip, and emerging from the lane, the carriage rolled out upon the high road, soon leaving the village far behind. Upon the right stretched miles of pasture land, with here and there a solitary cottage, in which, however, the lights were extinguished, for the inhabitants kept early hours. To the left, copse and field flitted past, and far ahead, loomed the dark forest.

For some minutes the Curé waited for the explanation that he had been promised; then turning to the man who sat beside him, he gently inquired whether the journey would be a long one. His companion leaned forward suddenly as if to reply, and with great rapidity passed something soft and dark before the Curé's eyes. Instantly the unfortunate priest realized that he was blindfolded, and that the bandage was securely fastened behind his head. At the same moment the man seated opposite him deftly fitted a pair of straps round the Curé's wrists, and he knew that he was a prisoner.

"Give no alarm," hissed the man at his side. "You are powerless, and can do nothing. Keep quiet, and you shall have nothing to fear."

"I am in God's hands, as well as yours," responded the poor priest meekly. "Rest assured that I would not willingly endanger my own safety. But may I not speak?"

"Say on," replied he who had entered the cottage, and who seemed the only one likely to conduct any conversation, "but we do not promise to answer you."

"I am a servant of the Church, and as such I come to give the aid you asked me. It ill beseems anyone so to treat a Minister of God, and on such an errand—or was your tale a lie? I am a poor man. If your intention, or that of your colleagues, be robbery, the booty will be small. My good name, and the poor child at home, are all I have. Never to my knowledge have I done evil to any—living or dead. This can surely be no plan of vengeance, for in my life there is nothing to revenge."

"It is not vengeance," replied the dark-cloaked stranger, "nor is it robbery. Nor is the tale I told you false. Be satisfied. Your aid is needed by a dying man. But it is not the will of those who

desire your presence that you should meanwhile be free. Your eyes, your limbs, your lips even, must be guarded. Now rest, and sleep if you can, for there is much before you."

Sorely puzzled, and in deep distress of mind, but wisely deeming it folly to offer any opposition, Père Augustin remained quiescent, but to sleep was impossible. He could no longer see the shadows of the trees, but by the sound of the horses' feet he knew that the carriage had left the hard high road, for one of the softer ones near the borders of the forest. Presently a gradual descent was perceptible, and this by degrees increased. The road seemed to be taking a circular bend. Suddenly the horses were pulled up almost on their haunches, and the good Père was jerked forward in his seat. He felt his neighbour's hand upon his face.

"Make no sign. I must gag you," whispered the stranger.

"I assure you that is unnecessary," protested the priest. "I give you my word, I will not speak without permission."

The other gave a low, cynical laugh.

"M. le Curé, I have a profound respect for you, but I have not, as yet, had any opportunity of testing the truth of your word. Allow me."

The next instant the gag was forced into Père Augustin's mouth.

PART II.

A MURMURED colloquy was passing between the driver and some men outside. These were evidently armed, for Père Augustin could hear the subdued movements of their accoutrements. Then the carriage rolled slowly on, still going down-hill, and describing, as it appeared, circle after circle.

The time that was passing seemed interminable to the priest. Stout-hearted by nature, and too genuine himself to entertain suspicion, he yet could not help recalling poor little Chrétien's strange forebodings. What if he were indeed about to be murdered? But why? Why? The question resolved itself into a torturing doubt. Each moment he felt the drops of sweat rising upon his forehead, the beating of his pulses becoming more sickeningly distinct and frequent.

At length, when it seemed as though he could not endure the suspense for a moment longer, the carriage stopped again, and his companions got out, and assisted him to alight.

"Take our hands," said the spokesman, peremptorily, and between them they led him along.

Père Augustin could feel that he was walking upon softly carpeted floors in a space that was both warmed, and well lighted. A wave of murmur reached him, and died away. He descended two or three steps, with his captors, who then relinquished his hands, and pushed him slightly before them. A voice, deep but not unpleasant, called out,

"Good! Remove the gag and bandages."

This was done, and when Père Augustin's eyes became accustomed to the glare that met him, he found himself within a large, oval chamber, presumably hewn from the bowels of the earth. Natural rock pillars supported the roof of rough hewn stone, but the ground was strewn with rugs. At the further end of the room was a raised wooden dais, upon which was arranged a semicircle of men, thirteen in number, as Père Augustin ascertained when he had sufficient presence of mind to count them. At least two hundred more were seated about the room in various attitudes betokening attention and interest. All were armed with short swords and pistols, and all wore long dark cloaks, such as those of the two who now stood on either side of the priest, a little to the rear.

The central figure of the group upon the dais was a man of commanding aspect, with keen eyes and undaunted mien. He flung back his cloak, and, stepping forward, bowed low to the astonished priest.

"M. le Curé, of Roisineau, doubtless you wonder for what cause you are brought here, and in this manner. A few words will tell you all you need to know. We are met here as judges, and before our just tribunal a man has been condemned to die. A man who is guilty of a crime for which France has no law, and metes no punishment. But as France would let the sinner pass unscathed, we, her sons, to whom her honour is dear, requite her wrongs, and thus fulfil the noble, but thankless task of retributive justice. Yet, as we would not deprive any man of the consolation his religion may offer, we have desired your presence here to-night, that you may give the criminal that assistance your Church vouchsafes through you."

Here the speaker paused, evidently expecting Père Augustin to express his willingness in the matter, but the good Père was too completely dumbfounded by the turn events had taken to be able to utter a word, so the other continued—

"The condemned man awaits you now in his cell. You will be conducted to him. Half an hour will be permitted you to remain together, alone, but of course guarded. At the end of that time, you can witness the execution should you so desire. No?" as the priest shuddered—"Well, perhaps you will wish otherwise."

"After it is over, however, you will be safely escorted back to Roisineau in the same manner in which you came. Guard, fall in."

The last words were spoken sharply, in a different tone and manner, and they startled the good Père considerably, more especially as a score of armed men sprang to their feet, from amongst the company, and formed themselves three deep, round him.

One of his previous captors had slipped his valise into his hand, and thus, led by the flare of oil-lamps fixed into rough niches in the wall, the little party moved off down a long narrow passage. To Père Augustin, it seemed as though he were walking in a dream. It could not be that he, the simple-minded Curé of Roisineau, into whose placid life nothing strange nor stirring had ever come, could really be taking part in these extraordinary proceedings. But if he found them so, what must they be to the man who was even now prepared to meet him, and who was expecting to receive his death at the hands of these lawless avengers? Would it not be Père Augustin's duty to attempt his rescue, to strike a blow—if even a feeble one, on his behalf? And yet, how powerless he was! What could he do, one poor old man, alone, and unarmed, against two hundred reckless desperadoes? He shivered at the thought. But he could not consider them wholly lost to all considerations of honour.

The very speech that had been made to him by their ringleader upheld it. In their conduct to himself he could complain of no unnecessarily harsh treatment—scarcely of discourtesy. True, they had resorted to stratagem to ensure his presence, but how else could they have obtained it? And the motive that made their desire all-compelling, softened their conduct in the good Père's eyes. At least, they would hasten no guilty soul into eternity unshriven.

His thoughts were brought to an abrupt termination by the pause

of his escort before a narrow opening in the rocky wall, where a heavy oaken door swung on stout hinges. Four men with fixed bayonets guarded it. One of these inserted a key, which ground slowly in the lock; he then pushed open the door, signing to Père Augustin to enter. For an instant the latter hesitated, not knowing whom, or what reception, he might meet with. Then with calm exterior, he complied. The oak door closed behind him with a sullen sound that seemed to echo through him. What if he should never come out again alive? He stood half dazed, and momentarily sick with apprehension, before he became aware of a figure crouched beside an aperture in the wall beyond. It was motionless when the Curé's glance first fell upon it, but when, impelled by pity and by curiosity, he took a step forward, the figure stirred, raising a face that showed ghastly beneath the yellow glare of an oil-lamp above. Then the prisoner laughed, a hollow, weary laugh.

"Come nearer—do not be afraid! I cannot hurt you."

With an effort he lifted his arms. Heavy chains bound them to the brick-work that formed part of the wall behind him, into which strong iron staples were fastened. He struggled to his feet—they too were chained.

"You are safe—or you would not be admitted here alone. I am secured to my grave, see, that I may indulge in contemplation of it. A pretty place—is it not?"

Shocked and amazed, the Curé drew closer. The aperture behind the prisoner was wide enough, and just high enough, to permit an average-sized man to stand within its limits. Père Augustin glanced from it to the wretched creature before him, and measured his height with a glance.

"This is—for you?"

"Aye, M. le Curé—for your humble servant. A meet reward for my deeds, I am told. Perhaps it is so. You will judge better when you have heard all. In any case the realization cannot be much worse than the anticipation. I have been here a night and a day, and I feel that I have known—*Hell*."

"You look as though you might have been here years."

"Aye, years of suffering can be compressed into moments, and I have lived them. But come, M. le Curé, time passes, and I know that mine is short. I have lived a villain. Help me not to die a coward."

Père Augustin glanced round for something that should serve as table and chair. These, of the roughest description were at hand, and he made his preparations in silence, for his heart was hot within him, and he feared to make matters worse for the condemned man by giving utterance to sympathy that should prove ill-advised. However vile and evil the culprit's life might have been, however great the wrongs he had committed, it seemed to Père Augustin that no offence could merit such a punishment. But whether deserved or not, certain it was that the Curé could not avert it, though its horrors he might be able in part to assuage.

"Kneel down, my son, I am ready," and the criminal crept humbly to his side, and knelt, softened as the hardest are within the immediate presence of the dreadful majesty of Death.

* * * *

Meanwhile the guard paced to and fro outside, and talked in low tones.

"A brave old fellow he! Didst note how he took his courage in his hands and never faltered? He'll not flinch!"

"Not for another, but the bravest of us are cowards when our own turn comes."

"Tush! Man alive, I tell thee there was a look in his eyes that would shame Satan."

"Meaning *Le Capitaine*? May he see it then, for to my mind 'tis a dirty trick he means to play, and may cost more than he expects"

"Thou art a fool for thine opinion, *Bronchard*," broke in a black-browed man scornfully, "How can we let him go, thinkest thou, and leave ourselves at his mercy? *Le Capitaine* does not spill needless blood for pleasure."

"He had best take care then that he spills no drop of honest blood that never wrought harm to any. 'Twould be a blot upon *Le Cercle* that centuries could not efface."

Thus they talked, and the minutes sped on, all too swiftly for the two they guarded. The allotted time at length was over.

Slowly, and half reluctantly, the chief of the guard unlocked the door, which moved back heavily once more upon its hinges.

"*M. le Curé*! Time is up," he called, and waited for the priest to issue from the chamber. Père Augustin came forward.

"Present my compliments to your"—he paused for an appropriate title.

"Le Capitaine ? Oui, M'sieu—"

"Just so. To M. le Capitaine, and tell him I would avail myself of his promised permission to attend the execution."

The man he addressed saluted in silence, and wheeling round, walked briskly down the passage.

In a few minutes it was thronged with the rest of the band, the man they called Le Capitaine at their head.

"So, M. le Curé, you have changed your mind," he said, looking severely at Père Augustin with knitted forehead.

"By your leave, sir," replied the priest quietly. "The condemned man begs I shall remain, and in accordance with your expressed permission, I have ventured to promise that I will do so."

"So be it. Take your place there," thundered Le Capitaine pointing to a position as near as possible to the opening in the wall, and Père Augustin, with gentle dignity, moved towards the spot indicated.

Every detail of the scene that followed stirred his spirit to its depths. Every fibre within him cried out against the unaccustomed ordeal which he now witnessed; but more than ordinary strength was his, to comfort and uphold the miserable wretch beside him. If the means of grace of which he was permitted to be the imperfect medium were vouchsafed by his presence, how might he dare withhold it? Thus he reasoned, striving to quench the soul-sickness that from moment to moment threatened to overmaster him.

The story to which he had listened, poured forth in all its terrible details of outrage and crime, perpetrated not indeed against the narrow code of the republican laws, but against the souls and good name of fellow beings, had left its mark upon his face, on which horror was now so strangely blent with pity.

Although he was not here as judge, and in the awful scene at which he was present, his sympathies were deeply stirred by the agony of the condemned man, he realized keenly how just, though how lawless, was the vengeance meted out. The sufferer bore himself bravely, though the sweat that stood thickly upon his brow when he was removed, and placed in an upright posture within the wall, spoke plainly of his distress. His anguished glance sought that of Père Augustin continually, as in a clear voice the Curé repeated the last prayers for the dying.

It was all over in an incredibly short space of time, and the poor

old prêtre, feeling weak and ill now that the active strain had ceased, was escorted back to the Council-chamber by Le Capitaine himself. Here a cup of brandy was held to his lips, for he bid fair to faint away. Soon however a slight flush of colour returned to his aged cheeks, and eager to leave the place as soon as possible, he begged to be allowed to depart.

"Not so fast, M. le Curé," remarked the Captain with a slow enigmatical smile. "Our interview is not yet ended. I have now to trouble you to inform the Council and myself, of the full substance of all you recently heard from the lips of the man whom you saw immured."

"Of what was told me under the Seal of the Confessional? You ask what is impossible, sir," replied Père Augustin, with some haughtiness.

"It may appear so at first. Nevertheless, the choice is before you. Comply,—or"—he glanced significantly to the rear of the priest.

Père Augustin looked round. A dozen men of the guard were drawn up in line, within a few yards, their pistols levelled at—himself.

For an instant his mental balance wavered. The shock was severe. He knew now that his own life was at stake. Then summoning all the courage he possessed, and with one swift cry to Heaven for aid, he turned round again, holding out his trembling hands.

"M. le Capitaine, I have done you no injury. The man upon whom your vengeance has fallen was a sinner. I do not say that he did not deserve the death-punishment, though a more humane form of administration would have been more worthy of your clemency. But I—what have I done? I came here at your request, and have fulfilled your desire. Let me go in peace."

"That might not be unreasonable, save for a point in the matter which you have not considered. We are aware, of course, of the outline of the crimes for which the deceased (for I may safely call him so) has met his punishment, but *of the details of those crimes* we are ignorant. It is necessary that we should know them. We can obtain them from no man but yourself. You will understand therefore that you must give them to us."

"I regret deeply that you should have asked me a thing which it is not in my power to grant. This is against my religion. The Confessional is sacred, and what is confided under its Seal, may never be divulged."

"In this case it must be, or you know the alternative."

Père Augustin's shaking hands clutched each other firmly. Then he held his old white head very upright, and straightened his bent figure.

"I am ready to die, since it must be so," he said. "I crave only one thing. A short time—a few moments only, to commit my soul to God. There is none to pray for *me* or to be with *me* at the last. Do not deny me this one consolation."

"You shall have it—for how long? Ten minutes? Yes, that will suffice. Guard! march the prisoner back to the execution vault."

And thus, Père Augustin once more wearily retraced his steps, all hope dead within him. He had seen too much, to expect mercy for himself now.

Crushed by all that he had gone through, weakened by the fatigue of his journey, and the terrible events of the last hour, he had great difficulty in maintaining his strength sufficiently to walk steadily along the passage, and once he stumbled, and would have fallen but for the arm of one of the guard, who supported him, not unkindly, through the doorway, and placed him upon the rough seat within, where he had sat to hear the now immured man's confession. Not a sound came from the wall; the bricks were too thick. The guard withdrew and closed the door, leaving Père Augustin to his own thoughts.

It was a desolate spot, and the sense of loneliness speedily became oppressive. Fearing lest he should go mad, the unfortunate priest cast himself upon his knees, imploring Providence to come to his aid. The fervent simplicity of his faith helped him now. As a drowning man, swept onward by the current, seeing no chance of rescue, with nought but death below, and Heaven opening above him, he gave himself up to considerations of eternity. The past mattered little; in his guileless life there was no room for remorse, for he needed to make peace with none,—save God alone, and at the appointed time he rose, strengthened, and refreshed.

The thought of Chrétien had indeed overbrimmed his bitter cup, but for him too the good Père had faith, that the Father of the fatherless would be with him still. His chief prayer for the child was that he might never know the awful fate that had overtaken his benefactor.

Once more the armed band filed silently into the long narrow

room, and ranged themselves in order, nearly filling it with their numbers. Le Capitaine entered, and before them all, once again asked Père Augustin his decision.

"Remember we wage not war with such as you," said the Commander, throwing some persuasive kindliness into his voice, as he gravely regarded the meek, white-haired, old man before him. "You are a good man, and we seek not your death. Give us the information we desire, and you shall go free. Remember, too, that by doing so you can cause no harm to the dead man. He has passed beyond our reach, and is safe enough."

"As I soon shall be! No, M. Le Capataine, I were unworthy of Him whose humble servitor I have striven to be for nigh on seventy years were I to prove faithless now. I am ready. In mercy then shoot me, but let me face my murderers."

He held up his arms, and walking backwards, was about to place himself against the wall, in readiness for the final volley, when his foot stumbled against some loose bricks upon the floor, and turning to step out of the way, he perceived that another aperture, similar to the one he had before seen, was now freshly made, and yawned before him, while a large heap of bricks with which to close it, lay near.

He fell back a pace or two, the full horror of the situation striking him in all its intensity.

PART III.

A low, mocking laugh broke the stillness.

"Ah! M. le Curé, perhaps now you will awake to wisdom. You see your goal before you. It may prove more conducive to enable you to change your mind, than the pistols of these good comrades of mine here. After due consideration, we have come to the conclusion that shooting would be too abrupt a termination to a life like yours. Perhaps after a week of solitary confinement, you may wish that you had been less obdurate, but then it will be too late. Let me urge you therefore while there is time,"—but for once the Curé broke in hoarsely,

"Peace! peace! I beg of you—*be quick*."

At a sign from their leader a party of the men stepped forward, and assisted the half-fainting Curé to enter the niche. Then they

began building up the bricks about his feet, some of them stooping continually to hide the varying expressions of wonder and commiseration that crossed their hard faces.

Père Augustin implored them to hasten their work.

"Quick, quick, I beseech you," he exclaimed from time to time, "but do it thoroughly. Do the work thoroughly. Leave no chinks between, where air or daylight may come through. So shall all more speedily be overpast."

The men acquiesced with low monosyllabic grunts. Le Capitaine looked on well pleased. Presently, when the brick-work mounted to Père Augustin's shoulders, and only they, and the old man's white head were visible, he stepped forward and delayed the workmen with a gesture.

"Man," he said, and in his voice was a curious ring, that sounded like triumph, "Life is sweet. Will you have no more of it?"

But Père Augustin did not hear him. In spirit he was away in the little Chapel at Roisineau. It was evening-tide upon Saint Augustin's day,—his patron saint. The Père was kneeling before the small shrine bright with flowers and tapers. Incense was rising, and with it little Chrétien's voice, a high sweet treble. He was taking as a solo the first four lines of each verse of a favourite short metrical litany to the Saint, the congregation joining in with the rest. To-night Père Augustin knew that the gates of Heaven were opening, while ten thousand thousand of the redeemed were welcoming the music that rose from the Chapel of Roisineau, and the old priest's quavering tones were suddenly lifted in rapture, startling the throng of men who were waiting in the vault to see the conclusion of the tragedy:

"Aux faux honneurs, aux vanités du monde,
 "Nous avons dit un éternel adieu :
 "Soutiens nos cœurs, rends notre foi féconde
 "O Saint Docteur de l'Eglise de Dieu."

There was a pause while Père Augustin again listened in fancy to his dear child's voice, and then again joined in the melody he alone could hear.

"Le monde en vain nous offrira ses charmes :
 "D'être à Jesus, nous avons fait le vœu ;
 "Pour triompher, ah ! donne-nous des armes,
 "O Saint Docteur de l'Eglise de Dieu."

The crowd was motionless. None could speak or move. The lamps flickered on the strange scene, casting grotesque shadows on the men's rough faces, but on that of Père Augustin shone a glow that seemed a reflexion of transcendental beauty from another world.

The men gazed upwards, awed, and wondering, and now clear as a bell, rang out unfalteringly the last few lines of the litany.

" Lorsque pour nous la dernière des heures

" Aura sonné . . . Sur tes ailes de feu

" Porte notre âmes aux célestes demeures,

" O Saint Docteur de l'Eglise de Dieu."

The silence that followed lasted for a long minute. Then Le Capitaine stepped back, gruffly bidding the men continue their work. Père Augustin still stood with the glory of that dream of Heaven radiating his pale features. It was a look that forbade further speech with him, and it remained undisturbed till the bricks hid him completely from sight.

* * * *

Inside his narrow prison Père Augustin was scarcely conscious of the passing of the moments. Already his feet were swept by the sluggish stream that men call death. But although the physical darkness might be felt around him, his soul was uplifted upon wings that seemed poised in mid-air, ready to bear him away, far from cruelty, and wrong and suffering, to the land of peace and rest. His senses were steeped in music. Chrétien's voice had ceased, but exquisite breathings of melodies he never yet had heard, fell soothingly around him, until across them came a clear sound, difficult to define, that he construed into the ringing of those golden harps of which he had been dreaming. High above him, as it seemed, appeared a white speck, faint and small, but increasing every moment. It widened and deepened into a glow of light, such light as he had never thought to see again. Could it be from Heaven? There followed a rushing sound as of angelic wings, and with one sobbing prayer,

" Seigneur! Je viens! Ne me rejetez pas de Votre Presence," the brave spirit of the good old man failed him, and he sank exhausted, just as kind strong arms lifted him gently through the opening in the wall.

* * * *

" M le Curé, you are an honourable man, one upon whose simple word I would now stake my life, and all that I hold dear. Had you

attempted to buy your own, at the price offered you, I should have been powerless to save you, for my men would have pulled you down, and killed you as they would a treacherous hound, and I could only have deemed the action wise. By this test alone could we judge of your truth and good faith, and right nobly have you borne it. Now we know that the events of this night are safe in your keeping. You are free to go where you choose. My carriage awaits you."

So spoke Le Capitaine, with considerable deference, as he held out his hand to the Curé, who at first hesitated to take it.

"Do not refuse," pleaded the other, "I have as high a sense of honour as yourself. The scoundrel whom you were called to visit, as you know, deserved death, and he was not without warning. He knew us, and the reward he would meet with. His baseness deserved none less. But thanks to you, I have learnt how a good man, too, can die, and it is a lesson I shall not forget."

"One moment, M. le Capitaine. What I refused to divulge last night, I of course shall continue to keep secret. But if, at any time my evidence regarding you and your band is required, I shall consider myself at liberty to give it fully. I cannot report you to the police as matters stand, because my knowledge of you and your affairs is limited to what my own eyes have seen, as although the deceased man told me his name, and the circumstances of his connection with you, I am, of course, debarred from mentioning any information so given."

"I am aware that *you*, at least, would not take advantage of it," returned the other, with a profound bow. "For the rest, I am in your hands. But your knowledge, as you say, is small, and to keep it so I must request you to consent to return as you came. It is not much, I think, to ask, under the circumstances, as it will prevent your obtaining any undesirable insight into matters which we may not wish you to know, and which your conscience may not bind you to keep secret,—as for instance, the exact location of our headquarters."

The Captain smiled, but it was evident that he meant what he said.

"I have no choice but to agree," said the Curé."

After partaking of some refreshment, which the Le Capitaine insisted upon proffering, and which Père Augustin did not like to refuse, he was relieved to find himself once again seated in the carriage, although bound and blindfolded as before, and with his two former companions, who still maintained an uncompromising silence.

Arrived near the village of Roisineau, they once more removed the bandages, and with supreme thankfulness Père Augustin looked out of the window, and noted the blue of the sky, and the fresh green of the pasture-fields.

It seemed years since he had been here—a lifetime. Was it only yesterday that he had visited a young mother at that cottage? Only yesterday that he had chided some children for ruthless birds-nesting in that wood?

The early beams of the sun were tinging all the country-side with gold, and making it beautiful. A lark sprang up out of the dewy grass, carrying a joyous song with it. Tears rushed into Père Augustin's eyes, and he laid a silent thanksgiving upon the little bird's outspread wings.

They had stopped at his own gate now. His companions shook hands with him civilly, and one muttered a few words that might have been taken for an apology, but Père Augustin scarcely heard him. He was at home again, and with no thought but for that, he turned up the little path, between the rows of tall daisies, that were just unfolding their petals.

The house-door was shut. It was too early for Jeanneton to be about yet, but the old woman was not afraid of burglars, and she had left the bar down, thinking the Curé might return, so he lifted the latch and went in. The sun shone brilliantly into the little kitchen as he set the window open. It seemed to him that he must set everything open to-day, to let in God's sweet air and sunshine. He could hear Jeanneton stirring overhead. Then, very quietly he climbed the rickety stair to his own sleeping chamber.

Chrétien lay with his face to the door, as though he had gone to sleep in the hope of expectancy. Père Augustin stooped over him. The boy's cheek was wet as he touched it. He was a light sleeper, and woke suddenly, flinging up his arms round his friend's neck, half dazed with drowsiness, and joy.

"Mon père, mon père! Le bon Dieu be praised! Safe! Safe home again at last."

"Aye, my son," replied Père Augustin, tenderly, as he returned his caresses, adding softly, "If the Lord had not helped me, it had not failed but my soul had been put to silence."

Signs and Cognisances.

By R. M. LOCKHART.

WHATEVER may be thought of the value of heraldic devices and mottoes in the present day, it cannot be denied that the arms and legends of the leaders of men had an incalculable influence in the past. In the higher and more ancient houses the insignia were often full of a noble meaning that had its reference to the loftiest aims and ambitions; and the humblest representative of those whose powers or whose wisdom had gained for them such a recognition were often confirmed in such loyalty or personal virtue as they possessed by the thought of the origin of the arms. And to deny this, much of value, even in our own day, to what is now called heraldry, is to contradict the evident facts that men are concerned to keep up the honour of their families, and that they are expected to be, at least in some degree, examples of nobility even when no special claim is advanced for anything like hereditary honours,

It has long been a matter of dispute amongst antiquaries from what period the adoption of armorial bearings is to be dated. Some of the more zealous illustrators of the *arte of armorye* would carry it back to the heroic ages, because Achilles and Æneas are represented to have borne some device upon their shields. By more than one writer, the hieroglyphs of the heralds are deduced from those of ancient Egypt; while others see their origin in the symbols borne by commanders of all ages on their banners. The Scottish writer on the subject, Sir George Mackenzie, attributes their invention to the patriarch Jacob; but Gwillim assigns this honour to Alexander the Great. The most curious disquisition on the subject, however, is the *Treatise on Armorye* of the learned Prioress of Sopewell, the Lady Juliana Berners, who discusses the questions of "how gentymen began, and how the law of armys was first ordaynt," starting from the fall of the angels and the creation; she proves our Saviour to be "a gentylman on his moder's side," and goes on to show "by the lynage of coote armuris, how gentylmen are to be known from ungentylmen." No doubt, in the earliest ages, kings and military chieftains bore distinguishing devices on their standards—sometimes, perhaps, on their

shields and helmets ; but the general use of such devices, and their hereditary transmission, are practices that unquestionably arose only in the age of feudalism and chivalry ; and it is not difficult to account for their adoption. The essence of the feudal system was the obligation to military service of those who held lands under the lord or suzerain. Each knight was bound for his "fee" to bring into the field, when called on by his lord, a certain number of men-at-arms. A feudal army, therefore, was necessarily composed of a great number of separate companies, each obeying the orders only of its knightly leader, and fighting under his banner or pennon. It became expedient, consequently, to vary to a very great extent the symbols displayed on these standards ; and it is obvious how equally necessary it was that the person of the leader himself, who often fought with the visor of his helmet down, so that his features could not be distinguished, should be distinguished by the blazoning of conspicuous colours on his shield, and some well-known badge on his helmet. The sons of those who had "won bright honour" on such occasions would therefore naturally wish to bear the badges which their fathers' prowess had distinguished ; and the inheritance of arms was thus an unavoidable consequence of their general assumption.

Many heraldic signs and cognisances were, no doubt, originally assumed as distinctive decorations at tournaments ; but the greater number probably took their rise from incidents on the field of battle—such as the bloody heads and hands, the battle-axes and swords, gauntlets, arrows, turrets, and so forth, with which so many shields are charged. The "simple ordinaries," as they are called—the bar, the bend, the cross, &c.—were probably at their origin, but stripes of blood or paint stuck on the field of victory across a plain shield by its bearer or his approving leader. Some bearings are celebrated by tradition as having thus originated. We may instance as an early example of this kind, the cognisance of the Hays, Earls of Errol, in the Scottish peerage. The founder of the family, according to tradition, was a ploughman, who, with his two sons, rallied the Scots to the defeat of the Danes, at the battle of Luncarty (A.D. 942). The old man used a plough-yoke as a weapon, whence the crest of the Hays has remained to this day a rustic bearing a plough-yoke in his hands. To this class also belong the "augmentations" of their family coats, granted to our generals and admirals. Thus, in the arms of the Earl of Camperdown, a sailor is introduced as a "supporter."

The original of this sailor was one James Crawford, a Sunderland man, who, during the battle of Camperdown, climbed the stump of the mainmast of the "Venerable," flagship, and, although the rigging was shot away under his feet, kept his position, and no fewer than seven times nailed up Admiral Duncan's flag after it had been shot away.

The scallop-shells, besants, Saracen's heads, crescents and crosses in all their varieties, smack strongly of the crusades, in which they were doubtless first adopted. The animals with which so many coats are charged were probably assumed as emblematical of their respective qualities. The "magnanimous lion, king of beasts," was, of course, a general favourite, and every device that ingenuity could suggest was soon adopted to vary his mode of appearance. He is "tricked" of all colours, and in every attitude; he is cut up into demi-lions, or reduced to a lioncel; he is "collared," "crowned," "fettered" or "armed" with every known implement of violence; his head and limbs, and even his tail, are severed and displayed in every imaginable position; and lastly, the unlucky beast is *debruisé, dehaché*, or "*coupéd* in all parts" to adorn the coat of the Maitlands. Next to the lion in general esteem, ranks, perhaps, the leopard, two of which are supposed to have been borne on the shield of William the Conqueror. The stag, the boar, the eagle, the falcon, the greyhound, the bull and the horse run very close in the rivalry for favour. The technical description by heralds of some of these cognisances sounds not a little whimsical to the uninitiated, as where mention is made of "two greyhounds *respecting* each other," a "peacock *affronté*," a "buck's head *attired* proper," &c.

Some changes are evidently chosen as a sort of hieroglyph of the family name, such as the roach borne by Roches, the primroses of Lord Rosebery, the whales of Whalley, the arrows of Archer, the elephant of the Oliphants, and the three right arms, mailed and gauntleted, of the Armstrongs. Sometimes, however, the process is reversed, and the name is made to suit the arms, as in the case of that family one of whose members achieved just the other day the distinction of a two-volume biography by Mr. Andrew Lang. The name Lockhart was originally a topographical name of Celtic stock, and had nothing whatever to do with locks or hearts until the adoption (in commemoration of the pilgrimage of King Robert the Bruce's heart) of the device of a human heart and a fetter-lock, and the motto *corda serata fero*—"I bear a locked heart." Not only

have the earth, the air, and the waters under the earth been ransacked for heraldic figures, but the very heavens have been laid under contribution. Chaloner bears three cherubims; and suns, crescents, and stars shine on many shields. Bishops appropriately have for cognisances, keys, crosiers, paschal lambs, bibles, and even angels. But, perhaps the most singular device to be found at the present day is that of the house of Dalziel—a naked man hanging from a gibbet. This is a bearing of honour, despite its ugly look, and here again we have an instance of the motto giving the name to the family—Dalziel (pronounced Dalyell) is said to be the old Celtic equivalent of the family motto “I dare.”

The origin of “supporters” is much disputed by heralds, some maintaining that they are derived from the custom of an individual about to be invested with some dignity being led to his sovereign between two nobles, in remembrance of which he chooses two noble animals or figures to support his arms; others trace the supporters to the tournaments, at which the knights had their shields borne before them by pages tricked out as lions, griffins, black-amoors, and so forth. In England the use of supporters is confined to the peerage and knights of the garter, with the addition of a few untitled families who have received a royal grant for special services; while in Scotland, baronets of the Nova Scotia creation and chiefs of clans are also entitled to them. It might be noted here in connection with supporters that the familiar lion and unicorn of the royal arms are obliged sometimes to exchange places. As a general rule, the lion, which represents England, holds the post of honour at the right hand side of the shield, while two quarters of the shield itself are allotted to the leopards, which also represent England; but when the royal arms are used within the kingdom of Scotland, the Scottish part of the bearings get—or ought to get—the position of honour. The unicorn, the supporter which represents the northern kingdom, takes the dexter side; and the quartering of the shield is reversed, Scotland’s rampant lion being duplicated, and taking the two quarters usually assigned to the English leopards, while the leopards take the one quarter usually occupied by the lion. In most cases where the royal arms are carved on government buildings in Scotland, they appear in the Scottish version just described. It is somewhat remarkable that this fact has not been grasped as a peg whereon to hang another “injustice” to poor ould Ireland.

Paid in Full.

By EVELYN E. BOGLE.

CHAPTER III.

I SUPPOSE the disadvantage of being extremely happy, is, that afterwards the smallest turning of the scales in the other direction makes you feel correspondingly miserable. At least, I think that must have been the reason why, as I sat in the large drawing-room at Craven Hill, listening to Aunt Matty and Mr. Drummond talking, I felt so very unhappy.

You see, I had put on my prettiest dress and an absolutely new hat, and Oswald, after saying very little more than "How d'ye do?" had allowed Ned to carry him off somewhere to talk about business. And though it was now a quarter to five, had not yet returned. And he had gone so readily too. Of course I liked that he should be good natured, but if he had only said "bother"—as he had done that morning—instead of complying at once with Ned's demands, and leaving the room with his arm in my brother's, and only a laughing backward glance in my direction, I think I should not have felt so suddenly deserted and alone. As it was, I drew patterns on the carpet with the end of my parasol, and listened to Aunt Matty explaining all the wants and necessities of the Deep Sea Fishermen to Mr. Drummond.

"Ha! Hum! Yes! Exactly!" he said at intervals. "Jerseys, stockings, mittens! Well I suppose, even if you can find ladies to work them for nothing you want money for the wool—or something—eh?"

"Yes, indeed," was the reply. "I assure you the wool is a great item of expense."

"Perhaps, then, you'll allow me to contribute towards defraying it?"

Aunt Matty's cheeks grew quite pink. I think that next to Ned and I, "The Deep Sea Fishermen" held the warmest place in her heart. And this was such an unexpected offer of help.

"Oh, you are very kind," she exclaimed, "very kind! I do

collect for it ; but lately the subscriptions, I am sorry to say, have rather fallen off——”

“The fishermen going out of fashion ? Well, perhaps I may be able to make up the deficit. Don’t you see Oswald coming back, yet, Miss Dorothy ? ”

I turned sharply round from the window, out of which I had been taking surreptitious glances. The odious old thing ! What eyes he had !

“I was admiring the rhododendrons,” I replied, with as much dignity as my rising colour would permit. “Is Mr. Drummond in the garden ? ”

“Oh, I don’t know,” laughing just as if he had heard a good joke. Then as the door opened : “Ah ; here are the truants, and the tea. Both welcome. Miss Powell, will you or your niece be so kind as to dispense it ? ”

Aunt Matty declined, on the plea that she never could remember who liked sugar, and I took the place behind the tea-pot. As I did so, I could not help thinking that Ned’s “business” must be of a very harassing nature, for Oswald now looked worried and put out.

“I’m afraid you have had a dull time of it,” he said, as he took his father’s and Aunt Matty’s tea from my hands.

“Oh dear no,” I answered. “I’ve had a real exciting time. There are thirty-six brass-headed nails in the side of the chair that Aunt Matty is sitting on, multiplied by four, that makes one hundred and forty-four ; and the ‘Deep Sea Fishermen’ like four-ply wool for their mittens. There is no connection between the two though.”

“Dolly, I *am* sorry.”

“About which : the nails or the fishermen ? ”

Oswald gave a little laugh, but it did not sound very mirthful.

“I must go up to town this evening,” he said.

I looked up quickly, and seeing the expression on his face, told myself that I was an ungrateful creature to find fault with him, while, after all, it was *my* brother’s business that he was worrying over.

“I suppose it is about Ned you are going ? ” I said. “Oswald, it *is* good of you ! ”

His face lighted up at once. “There is no question about goodness,” he answered, quickly. “I always feel I owe your brother a lot. Didn’t you know he once saved my life, at the risk of his own ? ”

I *had* heard the story before, it was one I always repeated to myself, when Ned's London doings weighed heaviest; surely he had good in him and would sober down some day. But before I could make any reply, the subject of our conversation came up with an empty cup, followed by old Mr. Drummond.

"Oswald," said the latter, in a low tone, "you know that cheque I gave you for one hundred pounds for Smith and Co.? I'll make out another to-morrow; in the meantime, put that one in an envelope, and address it to Miss Powell; I wish to give it as a subscription—mittens for seamen or something—but do it *now*."

"All right, sir!"

Oswald left the room, smiling, as if amused, and Ned followed, while I glanced across at Aunt Matty, who was sipping her tea in blissful unconsciousness of the joys in store for her. What would she say when she knew? One hundred pounds! Mr. Drummond must be a wealthy man, as well as generous.

Presently Oswald returned, and said something to his father, evidently concerning the subscription, for the latter answered: "Never mind, that will do as well, it's all money—save trouble perhaps. Eh? What's that?" as Oswald continued speaking. "Going to town?"

"I'm sorry, but I must go; by the six-three. I shall slip away now, and be back to luncheon to-morrow."

"What's the matter?"

"Only a little business suddenly turned up. Nothing of consequence. I will bring you Miss Powell's money." He disappeared, returning in a minute with a closed envelope in his hand, which he gave to his father, then, as the latter immediately advanced to Aunt Matty, he turned to me. "Will you remember this dull afternoon against me, when I turn up at tea-time to-morrow, Dolly?" he asked. I shook my head. But all the nice little things I might have said, to show him how I did forgive him, took flight, and I could only go on pleating the tea-cloth in a most senseless manner. He stooped down, and under cover of the tea cosy, kissed my hand. "I must go," he said. "Good-bye, my love, till to-morrow." The next moment he had left the room.

Almost immediately after, we took our departure, and as we were walking home, I slipped my hand under Aunt Matty's arm.

"How much do you think Mr. Drummond's subscription is?" I

asked. Aunt Matty looked down at the envelope with a glance that was almost reverential.

"My dear," she answered, "I think, mind, I only think; I won't be disappointed if I find myself mistaken, but it *feels* like a five pound note."

"Five pounds!" I echoed, contemptuously, at the same time absolving Mr. Drummond from all his sins as I thought of the pleasure in store for her. "It is a cheque for one hundred pounds, and——"

"It is *not*. What rubbish you are chattering."

It was Ned's voice that interrupted me, but it was his *face* that prevented me from at once replying. It was so white, and in his eyes a look that reminded me of that memorable day, when I had first met Oswald, and in the evening Ned had told me something dreadful would happen if he did not get twenty pounds. He looked away as he met my astonished gaze, but scarcely seemed to hear Aunt Matty's gentle:

"Edward, my *dear* boy!"

"The idea of old Drummond giving away a sum like that in *charity*," he continued, awkwardly, as if he were ashamed of his sudden outburst. "I wish you would not exaggerate things so, Dolly."

"But it is not exaggeration," I replied, "and I *know* there is a hundred pounds in that envelope, for I heard Mr. Drummond tell his son——"

"Nonsense; you misunderstood him. I am convinced you did."

Ned's manner was so excited and odd, that I made no reply to this, though Aunt Matty said: "Yes, dear, I think you must be mistaken."

After all, they would very soon find that I was not. But what difficulty could Ned be in now, to make him so irritable and unlike himself? Surely it must be something worse than usual. And so occupied was I with these thoughts, that when, on reaching home, Aunt Matty, in a little flutter of excitement, proceeded to open the envelope, I stood aside, absently smoothing my gloves, only turning, when I heard her say, exultantly: "It is a *ten* pound note, Dolly; how kind of him."

I looked at the thin, crackly piece of paper in much surprise. Then I had been mistaken after all. And yet I was almost sure I

had heard Mr. Drummond say: "The cheque for one hundred pounds—put it in an envelope for Miss Powell." Well, it was odd, but fortunately, Aunt Matty, who had evidently never given credence to my story, was more than satisfied with what was really a very handsome subscription; and later on in the evening, she sent a letter to Craven Hill, and a most official-looking receipt (the first she had torn out of her collecting book that year).

At dinner I was relieved to see that Ned had regained his spirits to a certain extent. He had not been present when Aunt Matty had opened her envelope; but he only laughed when I told him that he was right.

"Men—even wealthy ones—don't chuck money away at that rate," he answered, and then changing the subject, he talked and chatted, quite in his usual style, delighting Aunt Matty's heart by singing comic songs after dinner till it was time to go to bed.

My first waking thought the next morning was: Oswald is coming to-day. My next: then Aunt Matty will know, and I shall no longer feel as if I were keeping something from her.

But he was not coming till three or four in the afternoon, and there were all the morning hours to be got through, and, somehow, I could settle to nothing. My restlessness seemed, in a measure, shared by Ned, who also hung about idle and expectant looking, while I remembered that Oswald would probably be bringing him news of "the business," which had taken him to London. At last I decided to take the dogs a walk, and so infectious were their boisterous spirits, as they tore along the road, chasing the sparrows and each other, that I went further than I had intended, and it was past the luncheon hour when I returned. As I entered the house, the parlourmaid met me.

"If you please, miss," she said, "will you go into the dining-room? Miss Powell wishes to speak to you. Mr. Drummond is there," she added.

"Oh!" I exclaimed, while a sudden disinclination to enter the room came over me. I felt so hot and dusty, but Aunt Matty's voice calling: "Dorothy! Dorothy! is that you?" told me I was too late to beat a retreat. When I entered, one glance at both their faces showed me that their conversation was not on the subject I had prepared myself for. Aunt Matty's cap was all on one side—a sure sign of great inward perturbation; and Oswald rose from his

seat at the writing table to greet me—with a grave perplexed face.

"Dorothy," began Aunt Matty, "is not this a provoking business? Poor Mr. Drummond has lost some money, and all through his generosity to my 'fishermen.' You were quite right, dear, he meant me to have one hundred pounds. Think of it! But there was only ten pounds in the envelope, and we think the rest of the money must have dropped out."

"Miss Powell cannot find the envelope," put in Oswald. "I should like to have seen it. If I had not fastened it properly, the cheque *might* have dropped out and some of the notes. It hardly seems possible, though," he added.

"What was in the envelope?" I asked.

"A cheque for fifty pounds, and five ten-pound notes."

"So kind of your father," wailed Aunt Matty; "and to think he has lost it through me."

"Oh, to a certain extent the money is pretty safe," answered Oswald, "because after receiving your receipt, my father telegraphed the number of the notes and cheque to our bank, and payment is already stopped. Besides, I am the person," he continued, "on whom all the blame rests. I suppose I must have put in one note and chucked the rest away, or something equally clever."

"I know where the envelope will be," I said, suddenly; "in the pocket of your best dress, auntie; I'll run and look."

As I flew out of the room, I came into collision in the hall with Ned. At the sight of his face I stopped.

"Ned!" I exclaimed. "What is the matter? You are ill! I will call——"

"No one!" he gasped, seizing my arm roughly. "Don't be a fool! I'm all right; give me a glass of that wine."

The belated luncheon things were all on a tray near by—a decanter of wine and several glasses. I filled one as desired, and was relieved to see a little colour creep into Ned's white face, after he had drunk it, though he set down the glass with a hand that trembled visibly. He glanced at the clock, and then snatching his cap from the stand, walked towards the door.

"Ned," I cried, "where are you going? Do tell me what is wrong!"

"Nothing," he answered, sharply, shaking my hand off his arm. "I

have—business in the village I must see to. You need not say anything about it, though," he added, as he hurried down the avenue; and I turned to go upstairs in great perplexity.

Everything seemed to go wrong together; and when I presented the crumpled envelope to Oswald, it threw no light on the matter. Aunt Matty had torn it open at the top, but the flap was still securely fastened down. Oswald turned it about in his fingers.

"I shall institute another search in my waste-paper basket," he said; "and I do hope you will forgive my troubling you, and the way in which I have kept you from your lunch." He shook hands with Aunt Matty, and then came to where I stood, by the door, idly drawing my gloves through my fingers. "Our own affairs seem fated to suffer interruptions, Dorothy," he said. "My poor father does worry so over things. But I *shall* see you some time this afternoon. I thing I shall just run down to the Post Office, and see if there is any telegram from the bank."

"Then you'll be in the village," I said. "Ned's gone there, and he was looking so horribly ill, I wish you'd send him home if you meet him."

"I will, if I can," he answered, smiling. "Good-bye!"

As I sat down to my very late luncheon, with Aunt Matty, I told myself that everything would come right that afternoon, when Oswald came—probably with the missing notes and cheque in his hand—and then, *together*, we would plan some way by which Ned's "business" might be satisfactorily settled, once and for all.

CHAPTER IV.

JUNE roses with their strong sweet perfume! To this day whenever I see them or feel their scent I think of that afternoon when I sat in the drawing-room at "The Hollies" trying to entertain two ladies who were calling, and all the time wondering what was keeping Oswald, and if his old father was worrying his life out about the lost cheque!

The door swung open. I looked quickly round. "Mrs. Gray," announced Simpson in a solemn voice. In walked the rector's wife, and I turned away with a chill feeling of disappointment.

"If you please, Miss—" Simpson was standing at my side—"one of the servants from Craven Hill gave me this note for you."

I took it from her, wondering if something else had gone wrong. A glance round the room assured me that for a minute or so the four other occupants were sufficient for each other's entertainment, and I could read my letter unnoticed. It was not long and began very abruptly—

"I am leaving Penhurst, and you Dorothy (by the time you get this I shall probably have left) because I have just told my father that instead of giving the cheque and notes to your aunt, I gave them to a man in London in payment of a debt. I can give no further explanation,—but of course our engagement, everything, is at an end—is to be *forgotten*."

Dorothy, my father may give you details about the matter, believe them if you like, but also believe this. Though I may never see your face again, every word I have said to you, was true,—is *true*

OSWALD DRUMMOND."

"Dorothy dear, Dorothy! Mrs. Gray has no tea and Miss Smith would like some cake!" Aunt Matty's voice seemed to come from a long distance, but I crushed my letter—my first love letter—up in my hand, poured out Mrs. Gray's tea—she did take sugar—and gave Miss Smith the choice of cress sandwiches, cake, or toasted scones. I had made these scones myself that morning, but not for Miss Smith. Then I sat down and began to wonder vaguely if it were my mind or Oswald's that was going, or, granting our sanity, how did you set about "forgetting" people.

"And you quite understand me, Dolly." I became aware that Mrs. Gray was speaking to me. "I don't wish to give any trouble, but really I can't think of another place so suitable to the school treat. Such a beautiful large field it is; and if *you* would ask Mr. Drummond, I'm sure he would let us have it. I met his son as I was coming here, and stopped to sound him on the subject, but I could get no satisfactory answer, he seemed in a great hurry, to catch a train, I think, so I thought I had better ask you."

I murmured "Yes" and looked at the clock, while the first lines of the letter I held, returned to my mind, "I am leaving Penhurst and you."

Mrs. Gray had been here about a quarter of an hour; it was now

half-past four. Oswald must be going by the five minutes to five train. In twenty-five minutes he must be gone, would have left Penhurst—and me! I rose suddenly to my feet. Mrs. Gray was still talking, but about what I had not the faintest idea. "Excuse me a moment" I said, and left the room.

If anybody had been looking out of the drawing-room window two minutes later, they would have seen me pass on my way to the station.

I did not want any details from old Mr. Drummond, I told myself; I intended to get them from Oswald. What did I care about cheques. Fifty of them might be missing. Perhaps Aunt Matty was the thief; was sitting talking to Mrs. Gray just now, with all the notes up her sleeve.

I arrived at the station about ten minutes before the London train was expected, and found it in its usual sleepy silence; but the moment I stepped on to the platform I saw at the further end a tall, erect figure, the very sight of which made my breath come fast, and a choky feeling rise in my throat. How dare anyone say that *he* would take money that did not belong to him. I ran swiftly down the platform and called him by name. He turned sharply round.

"Dorothy!" he ejaculated, and for a moment stood looking silently at me.

"What does all this mean?" I began. "Why are you going away? Why——"

He pushed open the door of the little room that was dignified by the name of "waiting-room."

"Come in here," he said; then as I complied he added, "Did you not get my letter?"

"Yes" I said, feeling more miserable every moment.

Oswald looked so stern and cold.

"But why did you not come and *tell* me—about everything."

"I did not—wish to—see you" he said slowly.

And I had come half a mile, in a tremendous hurry, to see him! For an instant I struggled wildly to look indignant, then I gave up the battle, sat down on the horse-hair couch and burst into tears!

The next moment he was kneeling at my side, his arm round me, and leaving me no reason to call him "cold!"

"Dorothy, love," he said, "don't you understand? Did I not make it plain in my letter? My father believes me a thief——"

"I don't care about your father," I retorted; "You are not a thief."

"I gave the money that was meant for your aunt to another person." He repeated the words like a lesson he had learned by rote, and his eyes did not meet mine.

"I don't believe you," I answered boldly.

He rose to his feet and walked the length of the little room before replying, and when he did so, his voice was once more cold and still.

"That is why I am going," he said; "It is the only thing to be done, for, of course,"—with a bitter laugh—"I'm not fit company for honest men now."

"Don't, Oswald," I exclaimed. "Listen to me; you said in your letter that all you ever told me was true; well, then, I don't care what anybody believes—I don't care what you say yourself! If—you want money—Ned often does—I've got some, a little, and, oh, Oswald, don't go away, or else—take me with you!"

I was feeling quite desperate by this time, for a shrill whistle sounded in the distance, and I heard the solitary porter our little station boasted tramping about outside.

Oswald made a sudden movement, as if he would have taken me in his arms, then as suddenly checked himself, and once more walked the length of the room.

"I *can't* take you," he said in a hoarse, choked kind of voice, "it's utterly impossible! Oh, for Heaven's sake," he added almost roughly, "don't look at me like that!"

"Now for Charing Cross, Cannon Street and London Bridge," bawled the porter outside. There were two fat country-women and a farmer's boy standing on the platform, and the idea of packing off four passengers all at once evidently excited him.

In thundered the train, the country-woman and the boy, followed by the porter, commenced to rush up and down frantically. Trains only stopped a moment or so at Penhurst station, and the passengers they picked up were generally in a great state of excitement and confusion of mind.

Oswald caught both my hands in a grip that was absolute pain.

"Good-bye," he said under his breath—then he was gone. There was a great banging of doors, another shrill whistle, and three minutes later silence once more pervaded the station.

As I was leaving the waiting-room, I turned and looked back; what a common-place little apartment it was, with its three hard chairs and uninviting looking couch, and yet—it would never seem exactly common-place to me again.

Had any other people said "good-bye" there, I wondered, and left feeling as utterly miserable as I did, wondering what they were to do, how they were to live until—ah, that was the dreadful part, there was no "until" for me; what had been was to be forgotten!—at this point I hastily left; that hideous little waiting-room was surely haunted.

When I reached home I was surprised to find I had only been away forty minutes, and Mrs. Gray's umbrella was still in the hall. I met Simpson on the stairs, told her if Aunt Matty asked for me that I had a bad headache and was lying down, then I went to my room, locked the door, flung myself on the bed and gave full rein to my misery.

It was nearly dark when I heard Aunt Matty's voice outside, but before I opened the door, I pulled down the blind, as a slight shield to my tear-stained face. But the precaution was scarcely necessary, as after a few enquiries for my headache, she burst out, "Oh, Dolly, I am so distressed, Ned is going to London early to-morrow morning!"

"Is he?" I echoed stupidly; everybody seemed to be going away, I began to wish I could go too, but Aunt Matty's next words smote me reproachfully.

"Oh dear, dear," she sighed, "I wish Ned was a girl, he wouldn't want to go away then!"

I put my arms round her, and kissed her soft cheek.

"He will come back in a day or two," I said reassuringly, while I inwardly vowed that during that time I would put my own trouble aside and try and keep her in good spirits.

"Is there any packing to be done?"

"Nothing that Simpson and I cannot manage," she answered, "but it is such a pity, the washing has not come in, and I doubt if he will have enough collars! You, my dear child, should go to bed, your cheeks are quite hot. Are you sure you don't feel ill?"

"Quite," I answered, "I never get ill," but I gave her another hug before she left the room, there was something so comfortable in Aunt Matty's round plump little body! Even the way in which her shawl hung round her was motherly!

And then I fell to wondering if she had ever said "good-bye" to anybody. And would I some day be like her, placid and calm, only disturbed by the contrariness of other people's children, and the lateness of the weekly wash!

Ned went off before I was up the next morning, and I was dreadfully ashamed when I found that it was Aunt Matty who had given him his early breakfast. However, I came down full of good resolutions! At all costs I must not let Aunt Matty get into low spirits over Ned's departure!

As an outcome of this determination I went to the drawing-room with the intention of fulfilling an old promise to wash all her "special" pieces of china. Unfortunately, however, the first thing I chanced upon inside an old jar, was a photograph Ned had taken of Oswald, me and the dogs! It was not a bad one, but had never been properly developed, for it was turning yellow in places and had evidently been dropped into this jar to be out of the way.

Now, however, it appeared to me in the light of a treasure! I had no photograph of Oswald, and I was gazing at this through a mist of tears, when a voice said behind me—

"As soon as you have quite done looking at that thing, I will be obliged if you will devote a little attention to me!"

I turned sharply round and saw Mr. Drummond glaring at me through his spectacles.

"Is your aunt at home?" he asked, his keen eyes travelling slowly from my face to the photograph that I held in my hand. "Because I have brought the subscription I promised her for the 'seamen's stockings,' and I wish to apologise for the—mistake that was made about it."

I begin to think your advice Miss Dorothy was rather good, "Employ *servants* to do those messages you are disinclined for."

"I don't remember ever giving you such advice," I answered, coldly.

"Do you not? Ah, my memory is the best then. You told me that was what you did, and finished by congratulating me on having a *son* willing to run mine—he was willing, a little too willing! You are surprised perhaps that I speak to you like this, but you see I am aware, that the real state of the case is known to you. You were to have been his wife—but he sent you a letter yesterday. You should be thankful, young lady! You've narrowly escaped marrying a thief!"

"Yes, I suppose I should," I replied, the quiet evenness of my own voice surprising me. "But indeed, Mr. Drummond, I hardly think you know *how* narrow the escape was; because I answered your son's letter, a few minutes after, *in person*, and told him that I had no objection to being the wife of a thief! That I would rather go to the ends of the earth with him than stay here—alone! But he would not listen to me—in other words *I was refused*!! So you see the 'escape' was *very* narrow indeed!!"

Mr. Drummond made no immediate reply to this, and for a few moments we stood glaring at each other in silence. Then suddenly he produced an envelope, and held it towards me.

"Give that to your aunt," he said, "with what apologies you can make up! It's the cheque I owe her. She will get it this time!"

"How do you know?" I retorted, "aren't you afraid that *I* will steal it?"

"*No!*" he roared, dashing the envelope down on the nearest table with a whack that sent several photo frames and nick-nacks flying. "I'm not afraid that *you* will steal *my* money, because though you are an *utter* fool, you've got the pride of the devil!" And before I could make any reply to this flattering description of myself, he had hobbled from the room, downstairs, and out of the house!

When Aunt Matty came in, found the cheque, and heard that Mr. Drummond himself had brought it, I received as severe a scolding as she had ever given me, for my inhospitality in not asking him to stay to lunch, or at any rate rest a little before returning all that way in the heat, by himself! "Why, he has not been *anywhere* without the help of his son's arm!" she declared, "it's enough to kill him! Dorothy it *was* careless of you!"

I expressed my contrition as well as I could, at the same time feeling a reprehensible indifference as to whether Mr. Drummond's unusual exertions had such a dire result! All my good resolutions were broken! and that morning I neither dusted the drawing-room or washed the china!

But in the evening I was a prey to remorse! For as the dessert was being laid on the table, Simpson, with an air of importance, becoming a person who imparts news that she knows will cause a sensation, told us that she had just heard through the Craven Hill gardener—who I noticed was fond of paying evening visits at "The

Hollies"—that poor Mr. Drummond had been taken very dangerously ill early that afternoon, and that the doctor had telegraphed for two London nurses, and seemed to think very badly of him!

"And they do say, ma'am," added Simpson with a swift, sidelong glance at me, but growing more communicative as she saw the impression she was making on Aunt Matty, "this illness has been brought on in consequence of the quarrel he has had with his son, who left quite sudden yesterday afternoon, for no one knows where, his club address being the only one to which the news of his father's illness could be sent!" Of course this news distressed Aunt Matty greatly, but she scoffed at the idea of any disagreement between Oswald and his father; and I, feeling it impossible to say a word on that point, she tormented herself with the idea that it was all the results of the walk he had taken to our house, her opinion being strengthened, when, on inquiring the next day, we learned that Mr. Drummond was no better, and Mr. Oswald had newly arrived!

* * * *

The hope I had cherished, that things would somehow right themselves now that Oswald was once more in Penhurst, died slowly, but completely, as the days passed away and he neither came, or sent any message to me. Indeed, he might not have been in the place for anything I saw or heard of him! And this very fact went farther than anything else to convince me how completely apart we now were!

I suppose there was something altogether wrong with my sense of honour; but I know at that time I often thought that, if I had been perfectly sure that Oswald loved me as much as he had once told me he did, I could have forgiven him *anything*—even the fact that he had stolen another man's money! But on that second point I never had two opinions, and it was only the first I was now beginning to doubt. I think even Aunt Matty was feeling, that our relations with Craven Hill were on an entirely different footing. There were two nurses, so the uselessness of offering to manufacture beef-tea was obvious, and as the "curate's wife" was busy bringing up a family of chirping yellow chickens, of course, failing her, Mr. Drummond might have any common hen's eggs! We sent to enquire regularly, and were told sometimes that the patient was better, sometimes just the same, and it was from Simpson I learned anything about Oswald's movements.

Simpson was a curious girl, a very good parlour-maid, but the most stiff and conventional of all our servants. About that time, however, she suddenly conceived a great desire to add to her duties by assisting me in my dressing morning and evening! It was rather ridiculous, because I hate having a maid, but I found that the Craven Hill gardener was still constant in his evening visits, and *from him, through Simpson*, I obtained information, that meagre though it might be, was too precious to be lost by dispensing with her attentions, which even then I used to wonder at! And it was not till long after, that I discovered that the only time in his life when Oswald had taken any pronounced interest in gardening, was between June and July of that year, and that he also was aware of the *penchant* his gardener had for our parlour-maid!

So the days and weeks went by with a slow monotony that was very trying. "Mr. Oswald," I was told, "went to town every day, returning in the evening; at stated intervals seeing his father; and later information said that he only visited Craven Hill from Saturday to Monday. Meanwhile my principal occupation was trying to keep Aunt Matty in good spirits. She had caught a slight cold, which she found difficult to get rid of. Ned was still away, and his letters, few and far between, kept her anxious. He was not in London, but abroad, had been there nearly all the time. He had already made two requests for money, and since the last had been answered, a long silence had ensued.

Then one morning we were startled by receiving a telegram from London: "Mr. Edward Powell has met with an accident, and is lying here; 5, Washford Street, Bloomsbury Square. Please come at once.—H. Mason"

Aunt Matty rose to the emergency gallantly! I thought, considering how depressed she had been of late, that news of this sort would have completely overwhelmed her, but instead the news that someone required "nursing" seemed to endow her with new life and in the bustle and hurry of getting away, real anxiety was for the time forgotten.

She would not allow me to accompany her either, deciding that I would be better at home looking after the rooms that were to be prepared for the reception of the invalid, but at my earnest entreaty she took Simpson.

I had no need to complain of monotony that day! My hands were

full carrying out the numerous directions I had been given. But by the evening, when I had everything arranged, another orange coloured missive arrived instead of the invalid. Poor Ned was evidently too ill to be at once moved, and I was bidden to wait and keep in readiness to receive them. Waiting is always hard, especially when it follows excitement of any kind: and I found it so unendurable that I accepted a very unlooked for invitation sent by Mr. Drummond after lunch, saying he was sorry to hear my brother had been ill, and would I go up to Craven Hill and see him that afternoon for a few minutes. When I arrived, a soft voiced white-capped nurse conducted me to Mr. Drummond's dressing-room. On the way, in answer to a question how her patient was, and if she did not think seeing me would be bad for him, she said, "Oh, no, I think he has been wishing to see you lately!"

"To see *me*!" I repeated in much surprise.

"Surely not, I have good reason to believe he dislikes me extremely!"

The nurse smiled. "I think you are mistaken," she said gently, "of course I cannot help seeing that something—some family matter is troubling my patient. When he was at his worst he incessantly called for his son. In fact he would have nothing to say to anyone else! But as he got better, matters have been completely reversed, and since then you have been the only person he has expressed a wish to see!"

We had reached the door of the dressing-room by this time, and before I could say a word, I was in Mr. Drummond's presence. He was lying on a big sofa, looking much the same as when I had first seen him, a little more shrunken perhaps, but his eyes were as keen as ever. After I had said "How-do-you-do," and been provided with a chair, the nurse retired into the inner room, and Mr. Drummond said: "Had any further news of your brother?" As I replied in the negative, he grunted, "I suppose your aunt is worrying herself into fiddle-strings over him—and much good he has ever done either of you!"

This was a promising commencement! However, I told myself he was ill, and also the nurse's description of how he had called for Oswald, came to my mind. Perhaps he did love his son after all, I thought, so I answered quietly, "Yes, Aunt Matty is very anxious about Ned."

"I thought so—casting pearls before swine!—and they're all alike, not worth tuppence!"

"Oh, Mr. Drummond! *All* of them? Weren't you worth 'tuppence' when you were young!"

Rather to my surprise—for I was half afraid what the results of this retort might be—he gave a cackling little laugh. "Neatly turned," he said, "not bad! You know I sent for you because I'm sick of being agreed with, and you and I *never* agree! Do we?"

"N—no," I said slowly.

"Humph! You were surer of that the last time I saw you! Now listen to me!—lean forward! What I have to say must not be overheard! Do you know, before—mark you, *before*—Oswald acknowledged that he took that money, *he had received a telegram from the Bank* stating that a man had just presented the notes, had been arrested, and swore they had been given him by *Mr. Drummond's son*! Now, *how* can he be innocent!"

All the time he was speaking, his eyes were searching my face with a wistful eagerness that went to my heart. Poor lonely old man! How evident it was that in sending for me he had hoped I would have brought him some proof of Oswald's innocence!

The tears were in my eyes as I said "I don't know *how*, Mr. Drummond, except that I simply *can't* believe the opposite!" and I suddenly added, "I don't believe *you* believe him guilty either!"

"You have great powers of belief then! But in that case if he is not a thief, he must be a liar!"

I shook my head. But though the words sounded horrid, I did not feel angry with the speaker.

"I'm sure we have only heard *half a truth*!" I replied, "some day we will hear the rest!"

Then the nurse came into the room, and I, taking this as a hint that I had stayed long enough, took my departure, leaving Mr. Drummond's presence for the first time without feeling either enraged with my myself or him!

When I got home I found another telegram awaiting me; I was getting accustomed to them now, but this one realised my worst fears—"Edward dying, come at once!"

That hurried journey to London remains in my mind only as a kind of horrible dream. I remember feeling vaguely surprised by being met at the station by Oswald, and correspondingly depressed

at the appearance of No. 5, Washford Street, to which we drove in a hansom, Oswald giving me the latest information about Ned.

Everything in that part of London seemed hot and dusty. A hospital nurse—whose cap was the only spotlessly clean thing I ever saw in that house—was standing in the narrow passage, talking with a little man whom Oswald addressed as Dr. West, and who gave me an elaborate bow on being introduced, and said "Miss Powell can see her brother whenever she likes, only it must be for a very few minutes at a time." Then turning once more to the nurse, he added, "and remember, though I know it is difficult, as far as you can, keep *Mrs. Powell* out of the room. I shall come round again to-night, and—" He stopped suddenly and we all turned, as a noisy step was heard on the staircase, and a loud voice said, "Is that the doctor? I wish to speak to him, to ask him why I may not go into Mr. Powell's room. I have the best right of anybody here, *sure-ly*."

Out from the gloom of the dark little staircase, a woman appeared. She was pretty, in a loud, flashy style. But the "soiled" appearance that pervaded the whole house, rested on her also, on the red silk blouse that clothed her upper person and on the heavily be-ringed hand that was resting on the bannister.

Who on earth could she be, I wondered?

"Dolly!" It was Oswald's voice close behind me. He put his hand on my arm and gently drew me aside into a small room. A dull little place it seemed, and whether it was the appearance of the hard-looking couch, and shiny table, or the tone in which Oswald had uttered my name, I do not know, but I was immediately reminded of the waiting-room at Penhurst station, and for a moment I could hardly speak. At last I said, partly because I felt I must say something, "Who is that woman?"

Oswald's hand was on the bell, at my question he turned his head aside.

"She?—oh she lives here," he said hurriedly. "Now I am going to ring for some tea, I am sure you must want it." At that moment I heard the doctor's voice outside—"I am sorry, Mrs. Powell, but excitement of any kind, you know, is to be *strictly avoided*!"—Oswald pulled the bell sharply, but I did not feel inclined for tea.

"Who is she?" I repeated, "tell me! Why is she called Mrs. Powell?"

"She *is* Mrs. Powell," he answered, "she *is*—Ned's wife!"

"Ned's wife!" I repeated dully. "When—were they married? Is she—a lady?"

"I don't know,—some years ago, I think."

I sat down on one end of the hard couch and wondered vaguely what else I was going to hear, and also if "Ned's wife" always argued with the doctor as loudly as she was doing at present.

Then the door opened and Simpson appeared, making me feel more and more as if I were in a nightmare.

"Your aunt would like you to come upstairs, Miss Dorothy," she said; and I rose and followed her.

A sudden silence had settled down outside. Mrs. Powell and the doctor were nowhere to be seen, only the nurse was slowly mounting the stairs, and we followed, making a sort of procession.

At the top of the first flight I met Aunt Matty, and the dream-like feeling vanished as I clasped my arms round her.

"Oh, Dorothy!" was all she said, but there was a great deal expressed in those two words.

"Take off your hat," she continued, after a moment's silence, "and then you can see Edward, but do not be surprised if he does not know you."

He *did* know me, however, though at first I thought he did not, his words were so odd.

He held out his hand whenever he saw me, and beginning exactly as if he were finishing a conversation interrupted some minutes ago, he said in a low but distinct voice—

"He's an awfully good fellow, Doll!—regular brick! and remember I always meant to pay the money back—I never thought it would have come out—Aunt Mat was too sharp with her receipt—and then the notes—but he was awfully good—and I am sorry—awfully sorry."

Here he closed his eyes and seemed to go off to sleep. But these words had put such a horrible thought into my head that forgetting everything else I cried "Ned!" in a sharp tone of pain. The nurse appeared suddenly from some corner, but what she said I did not hear. Only Ned slowly opened his eyes.

"All right," he said, "Drummond did give the money—but he did not know I had changed the—the thing—I told him I'm sorry—awfully—" His voice died away, and the next moment I was

outside the room, sitting on the stair, the nurse regarding me with stern disapproving eyes!

"You shouldn't have cried out like that!" she said; then her voice changed suddenly, and she added "Don't look so frightened, I don't suppose you've done any harm. Would you like to go to your room? I expect you are very tired—or tea will be ready downstairs, and Mr. Drummond——"

"No! no!" I broke in, rising to my feet," "I should prefer to go to my room, I don't want anything or to see anybody—but can I be of any help?"

Nurse smiled, and shook her head, as she followed me upstairs. "There are quite enough of us," she said. "This is your room. Your aunt will likely be up to see you presently, and if your brother should ask for you I will send." But I was not summoned to the sick-room, till very early the next morning, for then, in the grey dawn, before the sooty London sparrows had fully awakened, as a cool wind was whispering through the stunted evergreens in the back garden of Washford Street, Ned died.

* * *

Two days later we returned to "The Hollies," but all through the gloom of that sad journey, one thought held supremacy in my mind, and I wished vainly that I could cry like Aunt Matty or even Simpson. My brother had been, not only a thief, but he had sheltered himself at another man's expense, had stood by and let another take the blame! Oh better—far better, if he had died before! if he had not only risked, but *given* his life for Oswald's, that night long ago, when they had both been in peril! Then his memory would have been worthy every man's admiration! Now! oh how different! The words I had said to Mr. Drummond returned to my memory. "We have only heard half a truth. Some day we will hear the rest." How little I had guessed what the rest would be! and there was still more to hear! but it was later on, from Mr. Bennett's lips, that I got full information. Then I learned why Ned had been so horrified on hearing that unless he was unmarried at the age of twenty-five—by the terms of his father's will—he would not inherit the greater part of his money, for two months previously at the age of nineteen, he had married Julia Mason, a young woman who served in a restaurant somewhere in the city, and whose parents kept the lodging-house in Washford Street. Under these altered

circumstances they had evidently agreed to keep the marriage secret till Ned attained his majority, when he would acknowledge her as his wife and trust to luck that no one would inquire the date of the marriage day! But at this point Mr. Bennett was rather evasive; I think he felt it difficult to expose all the deceit my brother had contemplated practising, if by any chance he might obtain his father's money.

But, of course, in the interim Mrs. Edward Powell required some kind of income, and here was the difficulty. Ned's remittances were scanty, and threatening letters that she would come down to Penhurst and make known the marriage—unless paid to keep away—was the cause that, followed by the yielding to a sudden temptation, made my father's son a thief! Only a few words were needed from Mr. Bennett—I could fill in all the blanks!

Ned's continual business talks with Oswald, it all meant borrowing money, though of the marriage and where the money went to, Oswald was in ignorance. How well I recollected that day at Craven Hill! Ned had received a demand from his wife for thirty pounds, but being only able to obtain ten, he enclosed it in an envelope, and as he felt unwilling to present it himself, persuaded Oswald to do so. Then came the sudden temptation. When, in the library, he was left alone with the unfastened envelope containing one hundred pounds, while Oswald was absent, telling his father the cheque was for £50 and notes to make up the sum. Ned in his hurry had not noticed that! But exposure must have seemed to him inevitable when the next morning he had overheard Oswald say to us that Mr. Drummond had telegraphed the numbers and stopped payment! Then, at the Post Office he had met Oswald, who was in receipt of the telegram, informing him that Mr. Mason—to whom he had in all innocence given Ned's letter—had been arrested! and of course Oswald was at once aware of the fraud, and after that—it was still easier for me to supply the blanks! One of them had to bear the blame! Some words of Oswald's recurred to me, "I always consider I owe your brother a great deal." Well he had certainly paid his debt!

Mr. Bennett considered the whole affair "most unbusinesslike!" Shockingly so! A sum of one hundred pound passed from hand to hand and no written receipts! The thought nearly gave him a fit! Certainly, Mr. Oswald had broad ideas on the subject of friendship!

But oh ! most unbusinesslike, and he rustled the numerous papers scattered upon the table, and mopped his brow, and altogether it was some time before he could collect himself sufficiently to explain how Aunt Matty and my business affairs were now to be arranged.

"By the terms of your father's will," he said, "you are now heiress to everything. You will have a very good income one of these days, but for the present I would counsel a little economy, and I should not advise you to be in a hurry to return to Craven Hill. The Drummonds are good tenants, and there are debts to be paid, which, though you may not be legally——"

"I should like *everything* paid," I broke in, "especially anything that is owed to Mr. Drummond. And we were talking about Craven Hill last night; Aunt Matty and I both want to leave Penhurst for a time—and go abroad; I should like to go at once—this week. And you may do anything you like about Craven Hill, Mr. Bennett—at least, please Aunt Matty first—and let us both get away *soon*."

Mr. Bennett gave me a half-disapproving, half-pitying smile, but before he could make any reply, there was a tap at the door, and Simpson appeared.

"If you please, Miss," she said, "Mr. Oswald Drummond is in the drawing-room, and wishes to see you."

I gave a little gasp. Oswald of all people ! How could I possibly see him ? I could never look either of the Drummonds in the face again.

I did not wonder *now* that Oswald had thought it necessary to break our engagement, and for the first time it was with shame I recalled the words I had spoken to him at Penhurst station.

"I am engaged," I said hastily. "Tell Aunt Matty—she will see him."

"Miss Powell is out," said Simpson, with disapproval writ large on her face, and in her voice. The Craven Hill gardener was more hospitably treated at "The Hollies" than his master. And then Mr. Bennett unexpectedly came to my assistance.

"I should like very much to see Mr. Drummond," he said, adding, "and I shall not detain him long."

Thus left alone, I crossed the room, threw open one of the windows, and seated myself on the broad, cushioned sill.

How still everything lay in the warm afternoon sunshine. The

occasional bleating of the sheep in the meadows, and the sound of the gardener's rake on the gravel pathway alone broke the silence. But, oh, I told myself the country was only for happy people—people with minds at rest! This stillness and tranquillity were maddening to me now, and I longed still more to leave it all behind.

Presently I heard voices and footsteps on the stairs. Mr. Bennett's talk had *not* been long.

Then I remembered that Oswald would pass this window! The syringa bush would effectively screen me from observation, and though I had just thrown away an opportunity of meeting him, yet I felt I must see him go down the avenue for the last time; it would give me a kind of morbid pleasure.

The dining-room door opened, but I did not turn my head. If Mr. Bennett thought I was going to talk any more business, he was mistaken. After I had seen Oswald pass, I was going to my room to commence packing my boxes. But he was a long time coming; and surely Mr. Bennett did not mean to stand close behind me and watch for him too!

I turned sharply round—it was not Mr. Bennett at all, but Oswald.

"As the mountain won't come to Mahomet, Mahomet must go to the mountain," he said. "Why do you refuse to see me, Dolly?"

"Oh—I—I've been—talking business with Mr. Bennett all the morning." They were the first words that came into my head, and I felt their foolishness as I uttered them, and listened to his reply.

"But I did not mean to talk 'business' with you. Dolly," he continued, seating himself beside me, "it is not long—as one counts days and weeks—since I asked you to be my wife, but events have made it seem like years. *Now*, however, we need wait no longer, why should we not be married soon?"

"Oh no!" I exclaimed, springing to my feet, but Oswald's arm prevented me leaving my place on the window-ledge.

"What is the matter?" he said quietly.

"How can you ask?" I retorted. "Do you think I do not *know* all that Ned did?—He stole your father's money. He—he was a thief—and he let *you* be called one——"

"Yes, and you said you would not mind being the wife of one; and when I had—wisely or unwisely, I can hardly say which—cut my—

self adrift from everyone, who was it stood by me, and offered me—herself? Oh, my love, because I did not *say* much that day, and went away and left you, don't think it was because I didn't value your sweet little words, and offers of help! And as for Ned, I don't think either you or I can judge him. I once owed him my life, and I feel as if, indirectly, I owe him my present happiness, and *that* covers all!"

* * * *

"How did you get rid of Mr. Bennett?" I asked after a short interval, during which I had been successfully brought round to Oswald's way of thinking.

"Oh, very easily, I merely told him that I had not a moment to spare, and must at once see *you* on urgent private business. Of course he understood and sent me down here. He's a very good fellow, Dorothy!"

Handwriting and Character as revealed thereby.

By RICHARD DIMSDALE STOCKER.

Author of "A CONCORDANCE OF GRAPHOLOGY AND PHYSIOGNOMY,"
"PRACTICAL GRAPHOLOGY," etc., etc.

ALTHOUGH, to some extent, one's handwriting may appear to be fettered and dominated by the spirit of conventionality, on account of the fact of certain special forms of strokes having to do duty for certain letters, we shall find, when we come to examine it, that it is, perhaps, a more adequate guide to character than we at first imagined it to be.

If we, for one moment, pause to consider what handwriting actually *is*, we shall understand better why it may claim to be considered an index to its writer's disposition, temperament, and personality generally. The dictionary explains the term "writing" as the act or art of forming letters and characters for the purpose of recording or communicating ideas.

Now, I take it, most of my readers will grant that the *external* is

but the reflection or "visible sign" of the *internal*; in fact, it may be said to be the spirit and mind *personified*.

If we accept this theory—and there is no reason whatever why we should not do so—else why should everything have a definite form? and we proceed to notice the various shapes of the objects in animate (and inanimate, too, for the matter of that) nature, we shall observe that all forms must be constructed after either (or both) a *curvilinear* (which includes the perispheric, or globe-shaped, arch, &c.,) or *linear* (which comprises the horizontal and vertical, together with, of course, the angular) pattern or principle.

Having ascertained that this is, in reality, so, we have only to apply these basic laws to the members of the human body,—to the face and features in particular.

Most of my readers will grant that they are the emblems of the disposition of the subject who possesses them, and there is, most will admit, a *perfect* correspondence in form and feeling, between mind and matter.

Therefore, is it singular that the characters which we employ to convey our *ideas* should have sprung from hieroglyphics, and, as we have advanced, taken more *definite* and definable forms?

In olden times, few but the learned could use the pen; but at the present day, none are so unlettered that they cannot do so, unless it be the idiotic.

Form has been acknowledged to reveal character; consequently we are justified in believing that the straight line and curve (to which it is practically, if analyzed, restricted) have their own inherent *meanings* and special significations. Such, indeed, has been proved to be the case.

As far as I am aware, however, no writer on graphology has attempted to elucidate the matter in connection with his science, and this it will be my duty to do. By referring to any documents or autographs, one can dissect these elements of form; this done, we naturally wish to discover what they imply, broadly speaking: their significations may be tabulated as follows:—

$$\text{Curvilinear} \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Including the semi-circular,} \\ \text{or spherical elements.} \end{array} \right\} = \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Art, sentiment, emotion,} \\ \text{intuition, affection, imagi-} \\ \text{nation, enthusiasm.} \end{array} \right.$$

N.B.—This of course, covers the oval, etc. These elements

favour a *feminine* type of mind, and either oratorical, dramatic or musical abilities.

Rectilinear { Including the linear, angular, and rectangular, principle. } = { Science, reason, intellect, rectitude, stability, order, conservatism. }

N.B.—This, naturally, provides for the octagonal, &c. These elements induce a *masculine* cast of mind, philosophical and constructive tastes.

Any given specimen of handwriting may resemble *either* one or other of these basic types, or else it may *combine both* the two forms in its outline together. Of course, a *deficiency* of one argues, up to a certain point, a relative strength of the other—unless, as is sometimes the case, the law of *perversion* (which causes the handwriting to lose definiteness and “character,” by rendering the strokes either oblique, eccentric in form, or imperfect in their curvature) supervenes.

Now, the *curve* is produced, chiefly—when present,—in the formation of the “turn-strokes” (those which directly precede the up and down strokes); while the *line* is represented, principally, in the up and down strokes themselves; as well as in the horizontal bar which crosses the “t,” and also, in any lines drawn, or dashes, etc.

The law of *obliquity* is exemplified in *irregularity* of alignment, crookedness of the strokes, and so on.

[This is, of course, an abnormal type, and signifies either immorality, defective mentality, one-sidedness, non-stability, or else *marked* individuality, as the case may be.]

Taking the writing in the abstract, we may mention that certain special graphological signs have been discovered, the characteristics indicated by which are judged of according to the *development* of the various characters—figures, signs, letters, &c.

In this place, within the limits of a short magazine article, no detailed description can, of course, be entered into concerning all the faculties which have been localized; but such graphic symbols as are the most highly characteristic shall be touched upon.

As undevelopment, crudity, and immaturity characterize the mind of the infant, so the series of pen strokes which the average child—or child-like nature—produces,—evidences the unformed condition of the intellect.

“Text,” or round-hand, when the writer has no other style, invari-

ably indicates an unformed condition of mind and conventionality of ideas, or arrested development.

On the contrary, therefore, original handwriting will be found to be the off-shoot of talented persons, or those of genius; sometimes, however, when absurdly grotesque, it may pertain to a maniac. The handwriting of the insane, by the way, has received a good deal of attention, by graphological experts, of late.

Large handwriting denotes unlimited ideas, great schemes, and the love of taking things *en masse*. Very often it betokens the love of effect.

Small handwriting indicates limited notions—attention to detail, love of finish, and the inclination to look at the *minutiae*, rather than the *whole* of things.

Observation is indicated by angular, pointed writing; orderliness, by a careful, precise hand.

When the reflective or reasoning faculties are well defined, the writer will be inclined to place his or her letters singly—that is, they will, at intervals, at all events, be unconnected.

When the *letters and words* are constantly attached to one another, it denotes fluency of speech.

As may be expected, loving people write a looped, rounded and sloping hand (one which will lean to the right).

Energetic, forcible and ambitious characters pen a more or less forceful, go-a-head, rigid style.

Will-power is indicated, more particularly, according to the manner in which the final strokes terminate. In order to show strong powers of determination, they should finish either in a blunt, square-shaped manner, or else in a hook-like fashion.

This applies especially to the cross-bar of the "t." When this letter is left uncrossed, it shows a want of resolution.

Musical tastes may be inferred from a softly rounded style; artistic feeling and poetic instincts from harmonious, sweeping and elegant strokes of which the letters are formed.

Honourable conscientious people write a straightforward, consistent hand; untruthful, subtle persons, the reverse. Deceitful, dissimulating people run their handwriting into mere lines—into thread-like strokes: they close up their letters tightly, too, in their endeavours even to *conceal and hide their motives* when writing.

Hopeful people indite an ascendant, free and buoyant hand;

miserable persons the opposite. Generous individuals write with extended finals. Miserly folks cramp and pinch their writing.

In conclusion, although I advance the theory that the rectangular and rectilinear-formed individual will write a straight or angular hand, and a curvilinear, tapering-limbed person, a round or curved style, which will indicate their characteristics *because partaking of their form*, I only state that such will prove the case when the *natural, un-studied, spontaneous* writing is adopted. No artificial or consciously (or even unconsciously) *copied* writing is a fair example, it being but a *mere drawing*.

Experience will teach that the usual handwriting is an *unerring* guide to the grade of mentality and disposition.—*Facts are stubborn things*.

Damocles, or the Gates of Janus.

By THEODORA CORRIE.

Author of "IN SCORN OF CONSEQUENCE," "PETRONELLA DARCY,"
"ONLY THE AYAH," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XIV. (*continued*.)

"TED is much stronger this year," the duchess said; "he is more like his old self."

"Yes, he has made a wonderful recovery," said John, but there was a shade of constraint in his voice, and she noticed it.

"I had hoped to take Henrietta to town with me this spring, and to present her myself," she said with seeming irrelevance, "but it has been quite impossible. Perhaps it is just as well. There is plenty of time where the rising generation is concerned, and happiness comes faster if one doesn't look for it. John, don't let your pride darken that child's future."

He smiled, and shrugged his shoulders, much as Pegasus in pound might have given himself a shake, supposing that he had been in captivity for a long time with wings carefully clipped, and no immediate prospect of escape.

"I am not Henrietta's father or her guardian," he said. "Her future depends upon her mother's wishes to a great extent."

"May has had all she will ever get from me," said his aunt: "but Henrietta is a different person, and my own god-daughter. Whatever happens, your pride need not be hurt, John. If Solway is ready to start perhaps he will drive home with me. He doesn't tire one with talking."

But the Duchess was mistaken for once in her life. The carriage had not gone far on its homeward way before her step-son showed a decided inclination for conversation.

"I wonder what you have been discussing with John," he said. "I have an idea that Laura has been at her old tricks again. It is easy to see where most of the money has gone of late years. That woman would beggar the Great Mogul if she had the chance. John has been telling me that he must find a tenant for Godwin's Rest this autumn—that he means to turn out. He might just as well come yachting with me for nine months out of the twelve, but he is so desperately independent."

"Have you been trying to help him?"

Sol bit his lip. "He won't be helped. He talks of going abroad again."

"I wonder how the Nutshell would suit him as a *pied-à-terre*," she said meditatively.

"The Nutshell for John? Its altogether too small: you must be joking, mother: besides it's occupied."

"Yes, for the present: but Drusilla has been telling me this afternoon that Cleveland urges her to take Lavender for a long sea voyage. Joe Swann, the brother who emigrated, has made money lately, and has settled in Melbourne: and he wants his sisters to come out to him. Cleveland as good as told me the other day that a voyage is the only thing that might possibly save Lavender's life. If they go away they will want a careful tenant for the Nutshell. It is a nice little house: more fit perhaps for a man's establishment than for a double family: eminently suitable for a bachelor."

"I am glad that you think so," he said shortly.

"I didn't say that I thought so, Solway. I was only picturing the probable reflections of someone else. To a lady, for instance, who had lived at the Chase, or at Godwin's Rest, the very thought of such a humiliating change of residence might prove insufferable: indeed I can well believe that very refined susceptibilities might be driven back to a charming house abroad, only waiting to be occupied, and to a climate where hot water pipes were not a necessity."

A sudden flash of comprehension came into his eyes, but she went on talking, in the same reflective voice with its little touch of quiet irony: "If the second person went away, the move would have accomplished all that one could desire, and matters might be placed on a more satisfactory footing."

"No: trust her to come back," he said.

"Not if she had sufficient inducement to stay away." She studied his disturbed face with a more kindly expression on her own than usual, then said: "You mean well, Solway, but I have been hoping for this crash for several reasons. Sampson's fall did a good deal of damage to his keepers as well as to himself: the destruction of the house wouldn't be amiss here either, and the damage where John is concerned need only be temporary. You needn't be afraid that he will have too much of the Nutshell if he goes there. I am ill enough, but I mean to see the last of Laura: and I can see my way to the end of this tangle too, even if you don't. For one thing May will be disposed of in a day or two."

"I shall miss May," he said. "A little of her exhilarates one like light champagne, though too much might give one a headache. Possibly she is just as well out of the way: she is a young person who has ideas of her own. But if you are counting on Henrietta's banishment, mother, as well as upon Laura's, I have a shrewd suspicion that one or two people may raise objections. I can quite understand that too much of Henrietta might be dangerous. She might even make a lazy person like myself energetic," he ended in his sleepiest voice.

"The age of miracles is past and Ted doesn't seem afraid of seeing too much of Hetty," she said dryly. Then she leant wearily back against her cushions and closed her eyes, with the air of a person who has finished with a subject: and Sol, quick to follow her example, tilted his hat to a comfortable angle, and accomplished the rest of the drive in silence.

It was a good augury for John's future happiness, he thought, that Catherine Harebrooke had made up her mind to see the last of Laura Godwin. The face at his side looked sadly worn, but the lines of the firm mouth betrayed no sign of weakness: and he knew by long experience that the difficulties which wear out a feeble nature only act as stimulants upon a stronger one. His father had always maintained that the Duchess was a born diplomat, and one

of the few women who could wait patiently for what they wanted till the right moment came for action. Where Ted was concerned Sol fancied that she might have cherished more ambitious views: but Ted inherited his father's smile, and his father's voice, and his wishes, like the laws of the Medes and Persians were never called in question with a view to alteration. More than this, Sol perceived that the Duchess, who set her own value upon most people, and cared not a straw for outside opinion, seemed greatly attracted by Henrietta. Let carping critics say what they will, supreme loveliness is a rare talisman. Even Solway himself, who, in olden days, used never to bestow more than a passing thought upon either of his so-called cousins, had more than once lately felt his pulses strangely quickened by the mere fact of Henrietta's presence. Unless Ted made the most of his opportunities it was possible that some more determined suitor might even yet cut him out.

But at Godwin's Rest on this particular evening no one could have lawfully accused Ted of wasting his opportunities, while in May he had found an unexpected ally. To do the girl justice, from her own point of view she had her sister's interest at heart: on the understanding that they did not clash with her own. On the eve of her marriage she felt in an amiable frame of mind, and inclined to settle finally the affairs of the small world which she was about to quit.

On entering the little fir wood at the back of Godwin's Rest she therefore came to a halt, and complained of a stone in her shoe. A stone meant Patrick's undivided assistance for several minutes, and the use of his fingers to untie the shoe lace, drawn for some unaccountable reason into an obstinate knot. An interested on-looker might have detected a gleam of satisfied mischief in one pair of eyes, when the stone, an imaginary one, had been satisfactorily dismissed, the shoe replaced, laced and tied to her small ladyship's satisfaction. This easy task accomplished, Patrick, only too pleased to get his lady love to himself for once, sat down on a bench under a friendly tree, and bewailed the coming supper in no measured terms. The pair of people in front were nearly out of sight by this time, strolling through the fir wood on their way to the orchard: Ted all the time rallying Henrietta on her shameful lack of sympathy over the defeat of the "Chasites" and Evelyn's disappointment.

"I am very sorry for you, and for cousin Evelyn," she said with dancing eyes.

"It looks like it," he said, "now May's sympathy has taken a more sensible turn ; she came over to our side days ago."

"May is a base deserter, Ted, her only excuse is that she had the best of all possible reasons to give. Now I haven't any strong inducement to incline me to change my colours."

She spoke in jest, but he looked at her for once without any answering smile, and with so curiously wistful an expression on his face that it struck her with a sense of pain and perplexity. "One expects impossibilities sometimes," he said. "Perhaps one is too apt to deceive oneself into temporary forgetfulness."

"You shouldn't talk of impossibilities, Ted. Cousin Evelyn always says that you get what you want more quickly than anyone else."

"Yes," he said, "but for those who are out of the race there are sometimes too many consolation prizes. To get one's own way too easily, often serves as a reminder that one is crippled. Why, Hetty, what's the matter ? You mustn't let me worry you with my fancies," for her eyes were full of tears.

"It's not true; I can't bear to hear you say such things."

"What is not true ? "

She flushed. "You know that you have grown out of all that : no one would notice it."

"You may say so," he said quietly, "but I shall always walk a little lame when I am'tired. I shall never be quite like other people again, so far as strength goes."

"Do you think that could alter you to anyone who cared for you ? "

"Are you so sure of that ? Are you sure for yourself, Hetty ? "

Henrietta was profoundly moved : there was an inexplicable look of dread in his eyes, they seemed to fear her answer : a haunting sound of grief never before heard in his voice : as if the insouciance that had always been a part of his nature, was nevertheless deep rooted in that silent pain which underlies the surface of all heroism, and blossoms into the fairest growths of life on the surface. At that moment Henrietta read his heart truly. Drawing close to him she said : "Sure ? Why I never noticed it, and if I did it could only make me care for you more than ever. Don't you know that by

this time, Ted?" In her eager sympathy she laid one hand on his arm, looking straight up into his face, and as she looked, her glance was arrested and held fast. There came over his whole bearing a change, a sudden intensity of gladness. Drawing a long breath as if released from an intolerable burden, he caught her hand in both his own. "Hetty," he said, "Hetty have I won you over to my side after all, without your finding me out?"

But Henrietta did not answer him, only stood trembling while the colour swept into her face. Then with a sudden unexpected movement she drew her hand away from his with the swiftness of a startled fawn, darted through the door in the wall, into the garden beyond, and disappeared from sight. So great was her haste that in another minute she would have reached the safe shelter of the house had not Godwin met her in full career.

"Whither away so fast?" he said, putting out his arm, and arresting the light flying figure. "I was just coming to look for you. What a child you are still to be running races all by yourself."

Brought to a standstill in the narrow pathway, she answered him with a mingling of humour and pathos in her voice, which he was quick to notice, "I am not a child any longer, Uncle John. Please try to remember that."

"Well then," he said, gently, "come with me, and give me the benefit of your advice. I want you to take a look at the flowers on the supper table. I am quite sure that Jeremiah hasn't put the decorations as you meant them to be."

Unable to escape, she slipped her hand through his arm, and took her way to the coach-house. Ted soon joined her there, giving advice and assistance with his usual imperturbability. The few remarks that he made to her were ordinary enough, but still startled and moved she could not keep a tinge of consciousness from her face—could not quite ignore the look in the eyes that were watching her. Keeping close to her uncle's side till the flowers were set straight, and then slipping away to the safe shelter of her own room, she felt all the while, that play at hide and seek as she would, the time was fast coming when Ted would find her.

CHAPTER XV.

ON the following afternoon, Henrietta came into May's bedroom, to find her lying down in a white dressing-gown, half way through the third volume of a novel. With her long, fair hair undone, thrown carelessly over the back of the pillow, with the white wrapper slipping back, showing a glimpse of rounded dimpled arms; with one hand under her cheek, and a certain lazy grace in her whole attitude, May looked the picture of ease. Henrietta coming up, stooped and kissed her wistfully, and May returned the caress smiling, yet a trifle preoccupied. At the moment, "her world lay spread in the leaves of her book," she had quite forgotten that this was the last day before her own wedding. The story was of an exciting kind, the plot approaching a crisis of interest. Wrapped up in the imaginary woes and perils of the heroine, she could give but a small portion of her mind to other, and more mundane, matters. Henrietta's remark that the Miss Swanns would be expecting them, and that it was quitetime to be off, brought an expression of genuine impatience to the pretty face on the pillow. "Oh dear, Henrietta, I had forgotten all about them. I really don't think I can manage it. It is such a hot afternoon, and I am quite tired out. I don't feel that I can face a walk."

"The road is all in the shade, and it isn't any distance," said Henrietta coaxingly; "and they will be so dreadfully disappointed. Miss Swann will have made a cake on purpose: you will come, won't you?"

"I shall have to get into my print dress again, Hetty. I meant to dress for dinner next; and it's just possible that Patrick may catch that earlier train from town; it would be so unkind if he found me out. Come and lie down here, and let's be comfortable. We can send a note to the Nutshell, and Miss Swann will understand—at least, she ought to if she doesn't—that a hundred and one things are apt to turn up at a time like this to prevent our coming. My writing-case is there; just give it to me." But Henrietta did not comply with this request.

"You don't know how they have set their hearts upon seeing us," she said gently. "I will go by myself if need be."

"But I don't want you to go, I want you here, and a note will do

just as well," said May. She did not like to be crossed, even in small matters, or to be made to feel selfish. If she elected to stay at home, Henrietta must not be allowed to fill the other half of a tiresome duty. But, meeting with unexpected opposition after a few minutes talk, the thought of the novel obtruded itself. If Henrietta stayed at home, what chance would there be of finishing that third volume. The two conflicting ideas trembled in the balance; then she said, stifling a yawn and a slight sense of shame together, "Well, go if you must, and say everything that is proper for me; but I think you are much too good to those two dear old bores."

"They don't bore me, May, and besides, I thought that it would be the last walk we should have together." Henrietta could not quite keep the disappointment out of her voice, and, oddly enough, this little personal speech took effect where all other pleading had failed. If May could ever be capable of self-denial, it would be for the sake of her sister. She admired unselfishness very much in other people, and indeed, everything good in the abstract; but to apply these same principles to herself seldom occurred to her. On this occasion she departed suddenly from her usual line of conduct. Not altogether willingly or graciously, perhaps, she tossed the novel to the bottom of the bed, and bringing her reluctant feet to the floor, remarked, "Well, you little torment, I will come if I must—if you have really set your heart upon it; but I think I am very good." In this mood she proceeded to dress, and to walk the little piece of shady road that led to the Nutshell. The smaller festivities of Godwin's Worthy would never afford her any real pleasure. This had been the case from the first evening of her return from abroad, when she had declared that life at home would bore her beyond bearing. It had bored her in the old childish days, when life to the one sister had been perfect, while the other fretted to go to school. True, Henrietta now longed for more liberty—for a wider range of interests; but apart from her own people, it seemed to her that she could not be happy. If she made new ties, it would only be to share them with older ones; while May felt merely greedy for personal happiness. Without realising this difference, Henrietta had felt saddened during the whirl of the last few weeks. Life is made up of trifles, and the whole sum of happiness often hangs on a smile, a look, one word of mutual sympathy, or the lack of it; and to-day it might be a small matter that May did not care to say good-bye to

the Miss Swanns ; but straws show the direction of the current, and her evident boredom cast a shadow over the whole expedition.

By the time the two sisters reached the cottage, Henrietta's spirits were at a low ebb, though they revived perforce at the first sight of Miss Swann's beaming face. It had gone five o'clock, and tea was quite ready—tea that could be equalled at no other house in the county—so Miss Swann had remarked to herself while inspecting the kitchen kettle only a few minutes before, to make sure that the water boiled. The beautiful old china, the tiny home-made rolls, the thick cream, the strawberries in the dragon china bowl, the fruit knives with their green ivory carved handles, the centre epergne of old silver, with pierced hanging baskets, filled with the choicest flowers from the small garden. Henrietta noted everything; and knew that on no ordinary occasion did any of these treasures see the light. She guessed, though May did not, that every bit of the best tea service had been carried from the store cupboard upstairs, and would by-and-by be washed up by Miss Swann's own hands. And the spindle-legged table in the corner, with the napkin thrown over it, suggested some pleasant secret, judging by the many glances sent in that particular direction.

Inwardly lamenting May's lack of appetite, and of interest, Henrietta gallantly threw herself into the breach. Like Froissart, at an ever-memorable banquet, of all the delicacies there provided, she, "the humble chronicler, did partake," and if she ate but a pretence of dinner later on, no one from the Nutshell would be any the wiser.

Miss Swann said afterwards that it was worth any amount of time and trouble to see how that dear child had enjoyed herself. May's slightly abstracted manner was put down to a very proper and natural preoccupation on the eve of such an important event as matrimony; and her lamentably small appetite for anything but fruit, kindly ascribed to the same cause. Of course it was a pity, but Miss Swann believed that people in love never did eat more than enough to satisfy a sparrow. Altogether the two little ladies felt that their party was a success. The event of the evening lay, of course, in the uncovering of the spindle-legged table. Miss Swann cleared her throat as she raised the napkin, and discovered underneath it a beautiful old box of French inlaid straw-work, given, she explained, many years ago, to her own mother, by a family friend,

who had held a post for a time in the household of His Majesty George the Fourth of blessed memory, and who, while there, had received the box as a gift from Prince William, who had himself taken it in the first instance from a captured French ship, when he was a middy. The box alone was a curiosity; and when Miss Swann proceeded to raise the lid, and disclosed a piece of exquisite old lace, May's delighted thanks were sincere and spontaneous.

The rest of her visit went off easily, and she had the grace to remark, walking home, that it was very kind of the Miss Swanns to give her anything. "They are dear old things after all," she said; "and now I come to think of it, that piece of point will be the very thing to go on my velvet dress; and, as Patrick hasn't come, I can finish my book before dinner."

Like many other people, May felt genuine interest in her own concerns, but she had no knack of standing, even in imagination, beyond her own shadow. And while the two girls were walking home, Miss Lavender pulled open a drawer in a cedar-wood desk, and touched with gentle fingers, a bundle of faded, rose-scented letters; living over again, in the dusk, the romance of her youth, with a tender thought at her heart for the young bride of to-morrow.

Possibly the most placid sleeper at Godwin's Rest that night, was May herself; and when she opened her eyes on the following morning, the golden sunbeams filtering through the venetian blinds, filled up the measure of her satisfaction. Proceeding with a leisurely dressing, aided by Sophie, she put on a white wrapper, and discussed the breakfast brought to her by Henrietta, with a comfortable conviction that the world was a very good place to live in. At the time of which I am writing, weddings were not put off till the afternoon; and though the old grandfather's clock on the staircase had not long struck nine, a pleasant stir seemed already to be going on in the house. M. de Brie had come over to breakfast by special invitation: indeed, during the last few weeks, he had become quite a tame cat about the house, and fifty times more efficacious than a salts bottle whenever one of Mrs. Goodwin's bad headaches threatened to become overpowering. To-day he brought with him a great box of orange blossoms, specially ordered beforehand from the Villa Salviani. May did not know that the first spray of the flowers went to her mother, made up by the Count himself, and the second to Henrietta, before the lion's share of the bouquet was sent up to her

room. As Mrs. Godwin said, the flowers were a most poetical offering, and it was just like dear Armand to remember her fondness for orange blossom, before even considering the bride. Dressed in an ideal gown of grey and silver brocade, she looked wonderfully handsome this morning. Her tall, Juno-like figure, and beautiful brown eyes, had paid small tribute to the passing years, though her mood to-day bordered on deep discontent, and a fretful expression crossed her face more than once. In her own estimation, the wedding would go off with a sad lack of *éclat*. Certainly it would be a less costly affair for John's pocket than he fancied that it might be, May having absolutely declined to ask a lot of people, or to have a sit-down breakfast.

"Unless we could do it properly, mamma," she said, "it would be absurd to give a big party or to attempt a big breakfast; and you know we can't afford it. I abominate speeches, and so does uncle John; besides, Patrick and I have made up our minds to catch that comfortable, fast, two o'clock train, instead of going by a crawler. We can take a luncheon basket with us if need be, and it will save a lot of fuss."

As usual, the weaker will went down before the stronger one, and May had her own way; but it was a very disappointing decision, and Mrs. Godwin, seated in an armchair in the breakfast-room, sighed heavily, as she gave a few final directions to her brother-in-law; and then went upstairs to see the bride dressed, with the air of a person who has accomplished a long day's work, and set an example to all early risers.

Two hours later the old clerk gave it as his opinion that Miss Godwin's was the prettiest wedding that had been seen in Godwin's Worthy for years: perhaps he was right. May certainly made a very striking looking bride. She had a style of her own which seemed to lend animation to all her surroundings. Her dress suited her admirably, and her personal emotion at the idea of leaving home was not sufficiently deep to bring about any of that tightness of heart provocative of unbecoming tears. She felt some real regret—as much as was in her—at parting with her sister; but an inward sense of intense contentment overpowered this tiny cloud in the sky. Her realisation of the vows taken, and the solemnity of the service, might best have been summed up by the determination to be a good wife to Patrick; coupled with the placid conviction

that he was desperately in love, and would make just the right sort of husband. Too well bred to betray her satisfaction openly, this sense of well being and inward security, lent an unusual tranquillity to her demeanour during the service, and rendered her an object of general admiration. Mrs. Godwin, in a bonnet of becoming velvet pansies and Brussels lace looked a very fine lady indeed, so the villagers agreed; though far too languidly elegant to satisfy the rustic mind. Mrs. Strafford, fair, pleasant, rosy faced, and inclined to embonpoint, openly wiping away a tear or two as the service proceeded, won various approving glances. She sat in the front pew with Margaret, and was strikingly dressed in one of Worth's latest creations. Henrietta's voice led the school children in the hymn; the one little falter in the opening verse passing unnoticed by most people. It was all over at last. The cutting of the wedding cake, the simple breakfast, and the changing of the bride's dress. Soon after one o'clock May drove off with her husband in a shower of rice, and in really nice time, as she said, to catch the two o'clock train.

Mrs. Godwin received all congratulations with her usual graciousness. She had never betrayed to the outside world the bitter disappointment given to her hopes by her daughter's behaviour. Moreover her feelings by this time were beginning to be a little intricate. The kaleidoscope of her mind rudely shaken, some weeks ago, had already assumed a distinctly fresh shape. Till lately she had never troubled herself much about Henrietta's future destiny; but now contrasting one daughter's undutifulness with the others pliability, and foiled where she once fondly hoped for success, she had already reared a very pretty new castle on the ruins of the old one.

Henrietta always obedient and affectionate would, she flattered herself, be as wax in her hands. All the more that every now and then struck by an unwonted softness in her mother's manner, the girl gave love back fourfold; her own hopes so often checked expanding in shy tentative caresses, much as a plant might put out a tendril here and there, in response to some unexpected gleam of sunshine.

Mrs. Godwin's own opinion, depending chiefly on a general verdict, had been struck to-day into surprised admiration, admiration bordering upon astonishment. She had been forced to see that the bridesmaid had attracted far more attention than the bride.

But when once the last guest had driven away, Henrietta disappeared for the rest of the afternoon, while her mother went upstairs to take a much needed siesta. Unfortunately her reflections were more complicated than usual, and threatened to banish sleep.

She could not disguise the fact that the Count's attentions were becoming very marked. It flattered her self love agreeably to feel that she could marry again if she chose to do so. Of course it was a little hard upon poor Armand, but she had never given him any real encouragement, and his frequent calls served as unexpected *sauce piquante* to her everyday dish of existence. She hated the English climate and loved Italian sunshine; but with the large fortune that would probably come to John before many months were over, she reflected that it would be sheer idiotcy to become a comparatively poor Countess. Meanwhile, as children play at snap-dragon at festival times, she enjoyed her cousin's constant visits; quite convinced that, whatever other people might do in similar circumstances, Laura Godwin would never burn her fingers. The prospect of enlarging Godwin's Rest, of adding to the stables, and building a range of orchid houses to surpass those at the Grange; of being better dressed than anyone else, while preserving semi-invalid habits; and posing in fact as a sort of grandee for the admiration of all comers, flattered her ambition and tended to overbalance the scale against the Count at the outset. Yet in Armand's company no one could be dull, and his flowing Italian came as a positive relief after the English of her other visitors, while in her secret heart his reminiscences stirred the old longing for Italian skies, and for the sunny, *dolce far niente* careless life. If the matter had been one of careful calculation Armand de Brie could not have appeared upon the scene at a more opportune moment. May's cool behaviour and little sarcastic speeches, had hurt and wounded Mrs. Godwin desperately; and had left a soreness, a blank in her heart which she seldom forgot except when the Count made his appearance. She disliked her brother-in-law, declaring him to be a person devoid of sympathy. Any serious conversation that took place between the two generally arose on the subject of unpaid bills, and such intercourse is apt to become of a strained character. Unfortunately for herself she failed to realise that John's endurance had been taxed to its utmost limit this year, and that she was standing at the moment on the brink of a volcano.

She cared nothing about getting into debt; while John, strictly honourable and almost hyper-sensitive where money matters were concerned, could never be induced to live beyond his income on the score of his prospective inheritance. Yet it was patent to everyone that the Duchess was failing fast. Since the day of the cricket match she had been unable to take her usual drive, and had declined coming to the wedding on the score of ill health, an unusual admission. Only this afternoon she had sent for John on a matter of business; and Mrs. Godwin said again to herself, when this summons came, that it was senseless to trouble about paltry economies when her brother-in-law's income would soon be an enormous one.

It may be remembered that John's grandmother, old Mrs. Godwin, only daughter and heiress of a very wealthy man; had left all her enormous fortune, not to her own son, whose reckless life had been a sore grief to her, but to her childless daughter, the Duchess of Harebrook for life only, and had devised the money to go afterwards to John Godwin in entirety.

If anyone had accused Laura Godwin of looking forward to her aunt's demise, she would have felt genuinely shocked. She often expressed regret for poor Aunt Catherine's weak health; but surely to build private castles in the air could hurt no one; and this afternoon carriages, horses, and orchid houses rose pleasingly before her mind's eye, coupled with Solway's ill health, and refusal to marry, and Ted's future prospects. She was mentally inditing a note to the next Duchess of Harebrook, when the sound of a clock striking, and Sophie's entrance with a cup of chocolate disturbed her day dream, and recalled to mind Henrietta's prolonged absence.

CHAPTER XVI.

Tea once over, for the first time in her life, Mrs. Godwin left her sofa in search of her daughter. Evelyn had fixed the first concert rehearsal for this evening, and had promised on her way to call for Henrietta. Mr. Prosser could never be persuaded to lend the school-room for the practices, so they were always held in an old riding hall attached to the Grange. Margaret had enlisted Henrietta's

help beforehand, and the girl had promised to take part in a trio, and play an accompaniment for Ted. But all thought of the concert seemed to have faded from her mind when Mrs. Godwin found her, curled up in the bedroom window-seat, deep in a leather-covered, musty-looking book.

Had May been going out, the whole household would have been aware of the fact, but Henrietta generally picked her own flowers, and the actual twisting of her pretty hair seldom took more than ten minutes. This evening she had apparently forgotten time and clothes alike.

Mrs. Godwin advanced with a sigh, the personal superintendence of her daughter's toilette was a new departure, not altogether satisfactory in kind. "My dear," she said, "I began to think you were lost; you must not forget that you are dining out to-night."

Henrietta started, looked up, and sprang to her feet. "Oh, mamma, I forgot the time. It isn't late, is it?"

"No," said Mrs. Godwin, "but I have had my chocolate, and I am very tired. I thought I would just see what you were going to wear, as I wish to take a rest before dinner. Evelyn said that she would come early with the carriage, so you may as well get ready in good time. What can you have found to read in that old book, I wonder?"

"It is an old play that Ted lent me, mamma; rather a rare book. He picked it up last year on an old stall in Paris."

"I am not sure that I approve of Ted lending you books, Henrietta. I believe French authors are seldom to be trusted." Mrs. Godwin shook her head, but smiled indulgently. She was no linguist, her knowledge of French so scanty that she could never read a book for her own amusement.

"But there is no harm in this story, and it is written in English," said Henrietta, looking at her mother with shy, pleased eyes. "It is a splendid play, called 'Alcirat.' I do love tragedies."

"On paper, perhaps," said Mrs. Godwin, smiling.

"Mamma you are too bad; please listen to this. It's the last scene of all. Marian, the heroine, is seated on a sofa; an attendant is standing by. Enter the Countess Isabella (her mother, and a horrid woman). Do just listen, mamma, there is plenty of time;" and Henrietta read:

"Child, what is this? They tell me you are sick."

Marian, wildly : " Have pity, pity ; bid Earl Philip wait.

Why did you tell me of Count Hubert's love too late ?

Attendant : " Madam, she raves ; her thoughts go all astray."

Marian, in a low voice : " Philip is my betrothed, though I shall never be his wife :

And Hubert is my lover ; never mine.

And if I dared to love him, where's the good ?

I did not guess his secret till too late. Alas !

You read the riddle for me, when you said

Such love would be a sin——"

Countess : " Yes ; sin—a moral sin,"

Marian : " He would not sin, nor I : you do not know us.

Since he has sworn a vow, I, too, would swear—

That's plain and simple, surely. I, too, would live

Unwedded if I dared. I would be faithful

To him if I dared ; as he will be to me, until——" (Pauses)

Countess : " Till when ? "

Marian : " Until I die, I can be still in heaven,

The other side of death, of weariness.

'Tis easy waiting—easier, by far, than here.

And then, some day, he would come after me,

And find me safe. There are no marriages

In heaven. We shall be as the angels then.

I read that once : I think it's in the bible."

Countess : " The bible is no book for a good Catholic,

Nor meet for private study. Talk not to me

Of bibles, or of death, or Hubert either.

Think of your honour, girl."

Marian : " Honour ! That's a sad word—

The saddest in the language, since it keeps

Hubert from me—my Hubert. Mine, did I say ?

Ah, no ! He is not mine. What ring is this

Sparkling upon my finger ? 'Tis the Earl's.

It holds my honour fast—a tiny circle,

Fashioned to cut my heart. It always was too small.

It presses me—close clinging like a fetter.

O, mother, take it off. Call Hubert back.

Not Philip, not the Earl."

Countess : " Alas, it is too late

For talk of Hubert. The priest is come. We only
Lack the bride. Earl Philip waits."

Marian: "The Earl may wait."

Countess: "Child, are you sick, or mad, or both? The hour grows
late—too late."

Marian: "Yes, madam, you are right. It is ~~too~~ late." (Rises.)

"Too late, too late for marriage, but none too soon for
death." (Falls).

As Henrietta finished reading, Mrs. Godwin gave a little shriek.
"There, there, my dear, that will do. I thought you really were
going to fall. You quite startled me. You might have made your
hair rough, and you have done it very prettily." With some diffi-
culty Henrietta came back to realities—to her every-day frame of
mind. "I am very sorry that I startled you, but what do you think
of it, mamma?" she asked.

"Think?" said Mrs. Godwin, moving to the dressing-table and
straightening a brush, "I think with the Countess that it is getting
much too late, and that I shan't have half time enough to rest. It
struck six before I came to you. What are you going to wear?"

Henrietta suppressed a sigh; she had yet to learn that sympathy
was almost a missing quality in her mother's nature.

"I am quite ready, mamma," she said. "When once I begin to
read, I forget everything, so I dressed first." Mrs. Godwin looked
at her in surprise. Even the most critical observer could scarcely
have found fault, but she did. "But you are only in your tea-gown
my dear. What can you be thinking about?"

"Cousin Evelyn advised me to wear it, mamma. She always
puts on a tea-gown at these practices, for the sake of the farmers'
daughters. They come after dinner, and they only wear their best
Sunday gowns; and if we were in our dinner dresses it might make
them feel uncomfortable. You see we are all performers for the
time being."

Mrs. Godwin's face might have offered a study for a physiogno-
mist. At any time it made her impatient to hear Evelyn quoted,
but doubly impatient at this particular juncture, when Henrietta
ought to be looking her best. "Of course the farmers' daughters
must expect to feel different," she said. "An affair of this kind
should not be so mixed. If Evelyn likes to give a concert to the
villagers, well and good: the people could come and listen. But to

drag the lower classes into it all, and to make yourselves uncomfortable for the sake of some milk-maid who must not have her best dress eclipsed, I must say that it is a reversal of everything that would have been considered correct in my young days. But I suppose this is only another of these radical modern notions."

"Oh, but we shan't be uncomfortable, *Madre*, I am very fond of my tea-gown. It is a comparatively new luxury, and you must say that I look nice in it, or I shan't feel a bit happy. Why," she went on half merrily, but with an underlying air of pretty tenderness, "Ted said, the other day, that he admired my 'half-way' kind of gown more than any dress he had seen this year, because it made him think of chestnut blossoms and spring. I told him that men didn't know anything about women's clothes, or how to describe them, and he——"

Here Henrietta paused suddenly. She had made this little speech merely wishing to chase away the ominous pucker from her mother's brow; but now, something in the elder face brought an answering consciousness into the younger one. Leaving her sentence unfinished, the girl turned away, and began straightening the lace at her throat with rather unsteady fingers; while, in a voice altered from the querulous to the benign, Mrs. Godwin remarked that Ted was generally right in his ideas, and that certainly there was no time left to make any change of costume.

Viewed from the standpoint of Ted's admiration, the disputed garment became correct at once. Amidst the luxury of pretty clothes in May's trousseau, this particular dress had been presented to Henrietta as an afterthought. It represented one of Liberty's happiest ideas, being made in a shade of ivory crape, with a soft inner front of silk, shot through with the palest green. And from the curved Medici collar with its inner line of mechin lace, the girl's fair, almost child-like, throat rose this evening like a flower from its sheath.

Dressed and ready, she yet seemed inclined to linger.

"You will be sure to come to see me when you get back, my dear," said her mother.

"Yes, mamma. I am afraid that I may be late, but I will come," said Henrietta, gathering up her cloak and hood. She half turned away, then stood for a moment hesitating, regarding the tall, languid figure by the dressing-table with wistful eyes.

Mrs. Godwin returned the look critically. "What is it?" she said. "Have you forgotten anything? Your dress is really very effective, love, very. I must go now, or I shan't be able to get up for dinner." But Henrietta drew closer, saying in a low voice, "Mamma, will you kiss me before I leave you."

"What a baby you are still," said her mother smiling; but she stooped and lightly touched her lips to the girl's cheek.

It never occurred to her to stroke the pretty head, or to draw the slight figure nearer in a motherly embrace. Henrietta's hair might be ruffled as much as it liked after the party, but at the present moment not a ribbon or a hairpin must be displaced, even by the touch of affection. Mrs. Godwin only measured the feelings of other people by her own standard. Had she been dying she would have endeavoured to pass away in a becoming attitude, without ruffling the frill of her night-dress.

(To be continued)

Chime on, Sweet Bells!

I hear afar the sound of sweet bells pealing,
Old tender thoughts, old dreams, are o'er me stealing,
Within a village church again I'm kneeling
With one I love;
I feel a gentle hand my own hand pressing,
With a touch so tenderly caressing,
While our restful hearts sing words of blessing
To Heav'n above.

Chime on, chime on! sweet bells, sweet bells!
Of old sweet days your music tells.

Sing on, sweet bells, across the dim hills swelling,
Your peaceful song, my tears of grief are quelling,
For 'tis of "Love not lost" your tones are telling,
Of "Changeless love";

Sing on, of Springs and Autumns quickly fleeting,
Of rest, when weary hearts shall cease their beating,
Of joy, when faithful souls at last are meeting
In Heav'n above.

Chime on, chime on! sweet bells, sweet bells!
Of Deathless love your music tells.

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